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Charlie on forbidden ground

THE HAPPY HOME;

OR,

THE CHILDREN AT THE RED HOUSE.

BY

HENRIETTA LUSHINGTON,

AUTHOR OF THE "SEA-SPIRIT, AND OTHER POEMS,"
ETC.



With Illustrations by G. J. Pinwell.

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DEDICATED,

WITH MANY GOOD WISHES,

TO

ALICE FRANCES THORNTON.



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THE HAPPY HOME.

CHAPTER I.

THE RED HOUSE.

APTAIN and Mrs. Elvington, with their five children, lived in the neighbourhood of the small town of Coleham, in Hampshire. Their home was a moderately-sized house of dark, weather-stained red brick, with latticed windows to all its low-roofed rooms, and a rustic porch over the door, covered in summer with roses, and ruddy in autumn with Virginia-creeper. Behind the house were a large kitchen-garden, an orchard, and a meadow just large enough for the cow and the pony, which might often be seen feeding there, and which shared at night the little wooden shed between the meadow and the orchard. In front of the house, on one side of the gravel walk leading to the porch, was a flower-garden; and on the other side, a smooth bit of lawn on which the drawing-room, in the

gabled part of the house, opened with glass doors. A low yew-hedge, with a paling behind it, separated the garden from the highroad, across which might be seen a wide stretch of open common, with a boundary line of blue hills far away against the sky. There were scattered clumps of pine-trees and furze-bushes here and there about the common, and occasional patches of heather, but great part of it was covered only with short, fine grass, very soft and pleasant to the tread. About a mile off, to the left, a belt of old trees marked the edge of a gentleman's park ; otherwise, the view was very wild and open.

It was a fine morning in the beginning of April, and the bright sunshine and westerly wind were almost warm, especially to the five young Elvingtons, who were busied in the fulfilment of a plan they had long entertained. This was no less than the erection of a large heap of rock-work in the part of the garden they called their own, lying near the yew-hedge. All through the past winter there had been many a consultation about this grand undertaking, and great was the joy when the garden was declared dry enough for the work to be begun, without risk of the young gardeners catching cold. Three or four days of the Easter holidays yet remained, and there was no prospect of rain, so every one was in high spirits, and breakfast was hardly over before the young ones were rushing to take their parts, according to previous arrangement. Gertrude, or Gerty, the eldest of the flock, about thirteen years old, called the eldest and the youngest of her brothers to follow

her with their barrows to a well-known heap of large stones at some distance across the common ; while Charlie and Bessie fetched their garden-tools and proceeded to prepare a place for the rock-work, by transplanting a number of roots from a round bed to the side borders. Gerty's party set off merrily, the sound of their singing and laughing quite drowning the squeaks and groans made by the wheels of the barrows, now rusty after their long winter's rest, while Charlie and Bessie worked on for some time almost in silence. At length Charlie stood leaning on his spade, and said, with much gravity :

"I'll tell you what, Bessie, there's something in the wind."

Bessie looked up from the plant, round whose root she was patting down the earth, shook back the hair from her flushed face, and said, "Wind did you say? I don't feel it; it seems to me very hot."

"Nonsense! you never understand anything," answered Charlie. "I tell you there's something going on, I'm certain."

Bessie rose from her knees, looked over the hedge, up and down the road, and repeated, "Something going on? I don't see anything."

"Oh! what a little green goose you are, to be sure!" exclaimed her brother, impatiently; "I don't mean *that*. Can't you see, papa and mamma are for ever talking over something or other; and don't you see how they watch for letters? I'm sure there's something going to happen."

Bessie looked puzzled, but presently stooped down again to her work, observing, "I don't see why we should mind about it. They won't tell us, I dare say."

"That's all you know about it," answered Charlie. And after a pause, he added, "Did you ever hear if we had any very, very old aunt or uncle?"

"No, Charlie, never. Why?"

"Well, I thought it might be that, you know. I thought, perhaps, some old, old relation that we didn't care for might have left us heaps of money, like that story we read about."

"That would be very nice," said Bessie. "How many things we would have! I suppose we should live in a grand house in a park, like the people in that story."

"Yes, and there should be a lake with a boat to row about it. And wouldn't we have a pony to ride?"

"And plenty of doves," suggested Bessie.

"And rabbits," continued Charlie; "I should say we might have sixty rabbits. What fun!"

"I would keep fowls," said Bessie, "and I would have six beautiful little dogs—but, oh, Charlie! wouldn't there be a great many lessons? I remember when I went with mamma to call at Lady Conway's, Miss Conway took me up to the schoolroom, and I never was so frightened in all my life. There was a German governess, and I could not make out a word she said; and we all sat up so stiffly, and only just went for one little walk in the afternoon. The girls told me it was always like that, and I was very glad

when mamma called me to go home. I don't think I should like to be rich, if Gerty and I were to be shut up in that way. I like saying my lessons to mamma, and running about here just as I like."

"Well, to be sure," said Charlie, "I suppose it might be dull for you girls, and I'm sure we're very jolly as we are. Still, you know, it may come, and you must be contented if it does, for I am quite sure there's some change expected. I heard papa say so."

"How nice it would be," said Bessie, "if papa was to have a castle left him, with a moat all round it, just on the edge of a cliff by the sea!"

"How could that be, you little goose? How could there be cliffs and the sea, and a moat all round too?" said Charlie, with a sneer.

"I mean that there should be a cliff one side," Bessie said, too much occupied with her own thoughts to heed her brother's rudeness; "and, on the other three sides, there might be a moat, and then I would have a draw-bridge over the moat, and a portcullis, and a horn at the gate. I should like to lie awake at night and hear the waves dashing against the cliff, and the wind moaning in the stone passages, and screaming round the old walls."

"Sometimes there might be wrecks," said Charlie, "and then you'd hear the guns of distress. I heard them once at Sidmouth. Don't you recollect?"

Bessie shuddered as she replied, "Oh yes, Charlie! I crept out of bed and went to the window, and then I saw

the flash of the guns, and now and then the lightning showed the poor, poor ship. I heard the cheering when the life-boat came safe back with the people that were saved. It was a dreadful kind of delight I felt, and I cried all night."

"Dreadful delight!" Charlie said, mockingly—"what nonsense girls talk! And then to cry when everybody was safe—just like a girl!"

Bessie looked rather ashamed of being just like a girl, and resumed her work, now nearly completed. She was not ten, and Charlie was eleven, and she had long been used to his assumption of superior wisdom, never attempting to dispute it. They were great friends, in spite of the ridicule he sometimes cast on her dreamy ways, as he called them. Indeed, he had been known to listen with pleasure to some of the tales Bessie spun so readily from her busy brain.

But now the silence was broken by shouts announcing the approach of Gerty and Harry, each wheeling along a heavily-laden barrow, while even little George (usually called "Dickie," or "Tom-tit," from his supposed resemblance to a bird) was pushing, with much labour, a load consisting of two or three large stones. Charlie and Bessie ran to meet the party.

"Well done, Tom-tit!" cried Bessie, as she took the barrow from her youngest brother, and proceeded to wheel it homewards, while Charlie helped Gertrude; "we are quite ready for you. I have just put in the last wall-

flower, and there was plenty of room, even allowing for the flower-seeds we must soon sow."

The contents of the barrows were soon overturned on the space prepared, but they made a very poor show, not being sufficient for a foundation. It was evident that a great many journeys to the stone-heap would be necessary, and they agreed to go by turns, in parties of two, while those who remained in the garden arranged the stones in proper positions ; and Tom-tit, meantime declaring he knew where to find some pieces of old wood in the orchard, brought sundry old logs, that were of great use in filling up odd corners.

The children worked till dark, hardly allowing themselves time to eat their dinner, and when they went in to have their tea they confessed to being very stiff and tired. Morning found them fresh and ready for work again, and by the end of the second day the heap of rock-work began to make quite a respectable appearance. On the third morning they were still at work.

"We must not have it too smooth," Bessie remarked ; "real rocks are uneven, so we must build it up higher in one place, not let it be all even."

The rest agreed, and a little more labour produced the desired effect. As they paused to admire the result, a voice startled them. "Good morning, young ladies and gentlemen. What a beautiful piece of rock-work you have there! Did you make it yourselves?" A little praise was very welcome after all their labour, and the

children turned to look at the speaker, while Charlie answered, "Yes; we only began it on Wednesday, and we have just finished it."

"Well done, sir; it's quite surprising," continued the new-comer. He was a stranger, and looked dusty and tired as if he had travelled far. On his back was slung a wooden box, and he carried two large bundles on his arm. "It's very pretty," continued the man, with a smile that seemed a little sly; "but I think I've one or two things in my packs here that would be an improvement. Just allow me to show you."

As he spoke he laid his bundles on the ground, swung his box round, and opened it, showing a tray filled with shells.

"Here, sir," he continued, addressing himself to Charlie, and handing him a large double shell, smooth inside, and covered outside with ridges striped with dark brown. "Just look at these tiger-shells; they're very handsome, and you might lay them sideways, to show the stripes, and fill them with mould and plant a pretty flower to grow out of them. Here are some others of a different shape, very handsome too. They'd mix well with the stones, ladies and gentlemen, and have a sweet effect."

It could not be denied that they would greatly improve the rock-work, and a whispered consultation ensued among the children as to the amount of money they could afford to lay out. The sum was not a large one. Harry had ninepence, Gerty a shilling, Charlie twopence, and Bessie a fourpenny-piece.

Harry was spokesman now.

"What is the price of the tiger-shells?" he asked.

"Well, sir," answered the pedlar, "the price is two shillings, and they're worth half-a-crown; but you shall have them for eighteenpence."

"And this one?"

"That's a shilling, sir; but I'll give it you for ninepence."

Gertrude went to fetch the money, while the pedlar produced more shells and tried to tempt the children to make further purchases. While this was going on, Captain and Mrs. Elvington came into the garden on their way to Coleham. "Oh, papa, papa!" cried little George, running to meet his father, "we are getting some beautiful shells to finish our rock-work. Do come and see."

Captain Elvington inspected the purchases and examined the pedlar's stock, putting aside while he did so five or six of the largest shells; and then he said to the man, "I will give you five shillings for all these if you like to sell them."

The pedlar muttered something about five shillings being very little.

"Just as you like, my man," said Captain Elvington. "I shall give no more."

"Well, sir, not to disappoint the young ladies and gentlemen—" continued the pedlar; and the bargain was concluded. The children were desired to keep their money, and take the shells as a present from papa, which

they gladly did, and the parents left them busied in placing their new treasures.

"They have really done it very well," Captain Elvington remarked to his wife, as they passed along by the yew-hedge on their way towards Coleham.

"Yes," she answered ; " but it seems hardly worth while for such a little time."

"It makes them happy," said Captain Elvington ; "and it is but a trifle."

Charlie and Bessie overheard these words, and looked at each other. The rest were too eager to notice them. Harry was setting off to ask the gardener for some rich mould, with which to fill the hollows of the rock-work. Before night the great work was completed, and various plants had been removed to decorate it. Ivy roots and ferns were to be sought on the morrow. Charlie knew there were plenty to be found about a mile off, in the hedge below the park-paling at the end of the common.



CHAPTER II.

CHARLIE'S TROUBLE.

CAPTAIN ELVINGTON'S house was about half a mile from Coleham, and the only dwelling immediately near it was a pretty cottage, not a hundred yards from the garden-gate on the same side of the road. This cottage was inhabited by a very old gentleman, his widowed daughter, and the three children of the latter. The young Elvingtons stood in some awe of the old gentleman, Mr. Ross, whom they considered fidgetty and precise. He had a great objection to loud talking and dirty shoes, and to slam a door in his house was a very grievous offence. To be sure, he might have had unselfish reasons for being so particular; but young people do not often stop to think of motives, so the old gentleman was voted rather tiresome. There was one person in his house who never murmured, who received all who approached her with smiles and kind cheerful words, so that the children never thought of pain and suffering in connexion with her. This was Mrs. Charlton, Mr. Ross's daughter. Yet she often lay

all day on a couch, and only moved with difficulty from room to room, with the help of crutches. In the summer she was sometimes carried into the garden, but all the winter she was a prisoner to the house.

Her boy went to a day-school at Coleham with the two Elvington boys, and her two little girls were the great friends of Gerty and Bessie, although somewhat younger. Mrs. Charlton taught her little girls herself, and few days passed in which, after lessons were over in both houses, the young friends did not take a walk together, or have a game of play on the common.

Bessie was very fond of her young friends, but she dearly loved their mother; and the sight of Mrs. Charlton's pale sweet face at the window would often tempt her away from the merriest game to creep softly upstairs and sit on a little stool beside the couch. She loved to listen to the stories Mrs. Charlton could tell of her own childhood, passed with her grandmother in a grand old house by the sea; or of her later travels in many countries, and strange adventures by sea and land, before she had become weak and helpless. It was better than a book to hear that dear voice telling true stories in the quiet room.

During the three days that the Elvingtons were employed in making their rock-work, the Charltons had been unable to join them, because their grandfather required them to be in constant attendance on some old friends who were passing a few days with him. On the Saturday morning, however, Charlie announced at breakfast that he

had seen a fly at Mr. Ross's gate loaded with luggage; so no doubt the old lady and gentleman were going away by the early train. The fly passed as he spoke, followed by a suppressed cheer from the children.

"Fred and his sisters will be able to go with us," said Gerty. "I am so glad!"

"Where are you going?" inquired Captain Elvington.

"To the edge of the common, papa, by Sir Charles Danvers' park-paling," replied Gerty. "We want some fern and ivy, and we know we can get it there in the little strip of wood."

"You may get as much as you like in the wood outside of the park-paling, but, remember, you are not to go within the park. I must have no more complaints of broken fences, you know."

Charlie coloured at the recollection of a trespass he had committed some months before, when Sir Charles Danvers had made a serious complaint to Captain Elvington.

"I promised *then*, papa," he answered, in a tone of wounded pride.

"I know you did, my boy. I only wished to remind you. There's no harm done."

Charlie was affronted, and rose from the table as soon as he could. The whole party were soon equipped and ready to set forth with trowels, spades, and barrows; but first they went in search of their neighbours, whom they met coming out of the cottage.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Fred, in a tone far louder than

he was accustomed to use so near the house. "I thought you'd be coming, and we're ready for anything. Grand-papa is gone off to London with his old friends, and won't be back till Monday. Wasn't it a right down shame to keep us here three days of the holidays palavering with that old couple? I never was so tired in all my life. I feel as stiff as a poker now."

"Never mind, old boy," said Harry; "it's all over now. We're going to the wood for some roots. Come with us."

"All right; and let's have hare and hounds afterwards, or something of the kind."

Meanwhile the girls exchanged greetings, and rapidly related to each other all that had happened since they parted. Then Mary Charlton said:

"I was coming with a message from mamma. She wants you all to come and drink tea with her this evening—Tom-tit and all."

"It will be delightful if we may," answered Gerty. "I am sure the boys will like it."

"What's that about the boys?" Charlie asked.

Gerty repeated Mrs. Charlton's invitation to him and Harry, who were both much gratified.

"Then I will tell mamma that unless we come back presently, after we have seen Mrs. Elvington, that you will certainly all come," said Mary. "She would rather be alone and quiet this morning, and she will be all ready for us at five o'clock."

Mrs. Elvington gave a ready consent, and then the

children proceeded to the little wood that skirted the common. It was, in fact, but a scanty belt of firs, with here and there an oak sapling; but it extended for a mile and a half beside the park-paling, and there were spots in it, well known to the children, where ferns grew luxuriantly. It was a pleasant task to unbind the trailing ivy from the stems of the trees, and dig deep for the long winding roots. It was thought dog-roses and woodbines might be coaxed to grow on the rock-work—at all events, it was worth while to try. Meantime, Charlie left the rest of the party, and walked on to a part of the wood where he fancied he remembered to have seen some periwinkles. No one had mentioned that plant, and he gloried in the thought of taking them by surprise. He pushed aside the brambles, climbed up banks, dived into hollows, but found no sign of the plant he sought. Scratched and heated with his efforts, he sat down to rest opposite a place where the park-paling was particularly low from the sinking of the bank; there was even a gap where three or four palings had been removed. Through this gap, unhappily, Charlie's eye fell on a thick cluster of periwinkle, and, forgetting all but the joy of securing a prize, he sprang through the opening, and had dug up several plants with his trowel before he recollected his promise to his father. As he started to his feet, he heard a rustling of the boughs on the other side of the paling, and a moment afterwards Bessie's face, quite pale with dismay, looked in upon him.

"Oh, Charlie! what have you done?"

It was like the voice of his own conscience.

"I forgot," he said hurriedly; "I wanted these flowers. I could not find any in the wood, and while I was resting I caught sight of these, and so I jumped in here without thinking. It can't be helped now, Bessie;" and with the roots in his hand he came to the opening.

"But," said Bessie, with hesitation, "do you think you ought to take the roots? It seems to me they are not ours. Wouldn't it be like stealing?"

She almost whispered the last word, yet Charlie started at the sound of it. In a moment he was on his knees, replacing the coveted roots, looking very red and troubled all the time. When the last plant was in the earth again, and the mould about it all smooth, he crept through the gap and stood in silence beside Bessie, who, fearing she had hurt his feelings, dared not look in his face.

"I don't think Sir Charles Danvers will be the worse," said Charlie, at last. "I dare say he has moved all those plants out of this wood, for I know there used to be a great many just here, and I don't see one now."

"I dare say," Bessie answered; and then she added, timidly, "What will you do now, Charlie?"

"Well, there is but one thing to be done, and it's nearly as bad as having a tooth out. There's Fred calling out, too, that they're ready for a game of hare and hounds. It's no use; I've lost my share of the fun. You go, Bessie, and say I can't come."

"Where are you going, then?" she inquired.

"Why, home to be sure; where else could I go? Didn't you hear me promise not to go over Sir Charles's boundary, and don't you know I went there after all? You needn't make a fellow talk about it. It's bad enough to have to tell papa I broke my word."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" Bessie exclaimed.

"Glad I'm in a scrape?" Charlie said, with gruff humour; "that's kind, certainly."

"No, Charlie, you know I don't mean that. But I'm glad you mean to go and tell papa now directly. Do let me walk back with you; indeed, I should like it much better than play."

"Well, come along then; only you must walk fast." He was not very gracious, but Bessie was satisfied, and after a few words of explanation to the other children, she departed with him, and the pair very soon approached their home.

Captain and Mrs. Elvington were walking up and down the garden in earnest conversation, and were much astonished when the two children interrupted them. Before there was time to ask for an explanation, Charlie burst forth with his confession—

"I am very sorry, papa, but I have been into Sir Charles's park."

"I thought you promised not to go?" said his father, in much surprise.

"So I did, papa. I never meant to go in, but there was

a hole in the paling, and I saw some flowers I wanted, and I never thought of anything till I saw Bessie's face."

"I am glad you have thought of telling me the truth at any rate, my boy," said Captain Elvington. "Tell me exactly how it happened."

But poor Charlie could only say, "I have broken my word; you will never be able to trust me again!" and then he fairly broke down into sobs and tears. Captain Elvington desired Bessie to explain the matter, and she did so in few words, doing her brother full justice. When she had done, Captain Elvington held out his hand, and said:

"Come, Charlie, you have been careless, but I shall not cease to trust you while you tell the truth so promptly and honestly. Only you must remember that when a gentleman gives his word he has no right to be careless and forgetful. Come and show me the place where this sad affair happened. You won't forget any more, I'm sure. I must see that you have done no harm by your trespass, so leave Bessie to take care of mamma, and you come with me."

Bessie enjoyed a quiet stroll with her mother, and an hour later she had the pleasure of seeing Charlie leading a merry game of hare and hounds across the common.



CHAPTER III.

A TEA-PARTY.

THE room in which Mrs. Charlton received her young guests had been always believed by Bessie to be one of the most beautiful rooms in all England. It was large for the size of the cottage, and had an oriel window with cushioned seats, and rich crimson curtains. The grey walls were relieved by many small pictures; the chimney-piece was of carved oak, and there were curious cabinets and book-cases of the same wood, black with age, in the recesses of the room. A soft, richly-coloured Persian carpet covered the floor, and there were easy chairs of all kinds of shapes, selected by Mr. Ross, in the hope that his daughter might sometimes be able to use one or other of them.

On this particular evening, she was seated in a large arm-chair near the fire, with which even the mild weather could not enable her to dispense. She looked quite gay and happy, with a white shawl over her usual dress, and a pretty cap, with pink ribbons, that Mary had insisted on her wearing, in honour of the little festival. Mary and

little Annie had also arranged large nosegays of primroses, bluebells, and violets, to decorate the room and the table. The tea-things were already spread, and all was ready when the Elvingtons, led by Fred Charlton, were heard coming upstairs. They came into the room very quietly, for there was something in the pale little face, and in the touch of the thin white hands, that always made even the boys feel quiet and subdued, though the voice that greeted them was always cheerful, and the smile always kind. Mrs. Charlton looked very happy as she watched the young ones gather round the table, and she soon set them at their ease, and led them on to tell her of their rock-work and all their little plans. By the time tea was over, and Mrs. Charlton's maid had carried away the tray, shadows were gathering outside, and the mists on the common looked chill and grey. Mary Charlton let the heavy curtains fall before the window, and Fred put a piece of wood on the fire, which blazed up cheerfully, and sent its flickering light into the farthest corners of the room.

"Now," said Mrs. Charlton, "you shall decide what we are to do. Shall we light the candles and examine my curiosities in the drawers of the cabinets, or look at pictures, or read aloud? Or shall we sit round the fire for awhile, and have a quiet talk?"

They all answered with one voice, "Pray don't light the candles; it is so pleasant in the firelight."

Even Bessie, who loved to open the drawers of the cabinets, and see the sea-eggs and delicate corals, the pale

amber beads from Persia, and the carved ivory puzzles from China, lying in their nests of scented cotton, and to handle, with a feeling of strange awe and wonder, rings that had been buried for hundreds of years on the hand of an Egyptian mummy, or gems that had adorned some lady overwhelmed in the great destruction of Pompeii long, long ago; even Bessie liked still better to hear her dear friend, Mrs. Charlton, talk of her own past life. So she drew a stool near the arm-chair and sat down—so close, that she could reach to kiss the dear hand now and then, or feel it laid gently on her head. Little Annie Charlton took her usual place on the other side of her mother, and the rest drew their chairs round the fire with an air of perfect content.

"The wind is rising outside," said Harry. "How pleasant it is to hear the wood crackling here, when it is so stormy."

"Yes," Mrs. Charlton answered; "but I like to hear the wind sweep over the common. At times, in the dusk, when I can just faintly see the line of those hills far away, I can almost fancy I am again looking out of my nursery window, a little child, with my little brother beside me."

"Was your nursery like this room?" asked the little Tomtit, in a voice of wonder.

"No," she replied, with a smile; "it was not so comfortable as this room; but all this old oak furniture that you see—even the chimney-piece with St. George and the

dragon on it—came from the first home I can remember, and I like to see them round me.”

“Do tell us about it,” said Gerty; “Bessie often says you tell such nice stories. Please tell us one now, about your being a little girl.”

Mrs. Charlton smiled again, while she patted Bessie’s head kindly, and then replied, “I am afraid I have not much to tell, but I will try. First, I must inform you that I never knew my mother. She died when I was a baby. That was my first misfortune, for a good mother like yours, Gerty, is a great blessing; and even a poor little weak mother like me is not a small one, is she, Mary?”

Mary and Annie both rushed forward, and clung lovingly round their mother’s neck, and even Fred declared there was nobody like her, and he should like to see who would contradict him. No one did contradict him, so Mrs. Charlton, begging her daughters to be seated, resumed her story.

“The first home I can remember was a very large, very old house of dark grey stone, standing back only a little way from the edge of a cliff. The foot of the cliff was washed by the waves of the Bristol Channel, and across the water were the blue Welsh hills. It is of those hills that I am reminded sometimes when I look out of this window in the dusk. The old house had stood hundreds of years, and it had belonged to my mother’s family all the time. Formerly, I suppose, there were broad lands belonging to it, but in my recollection there was only a

garden at the back, besides the strip of land with its covering of dry brownish grass, between the house and the cliff, and a meadow with a few fine trees beyond the garden. However, a few hundred yards inland rose the Quantock Hills (for my old home was in Somersetshire)—delightful breezy hills, with smooth green paths winding up among the fern, and steeps where only mountain sheep and merry children would care to climb.

“I dare say there had been a time when the old grey house was filled with people, for there were massive beds in the upper rooms, and there was more or less furniture in every apartment on the ground-floor. Many of these were, however, kept locked, and scarcely ever opened, for at the time I was a child very few persons lived there. When I look back, the first thing I seem to remember is one stormy evening when I stood with my brother at our nursery window, watching the mists roll over the water, while nurse was dressing us to go down to dessert with grand-mamma. I was up on the window-seat, obliged to stand very still while my hair was smoothed; and my brother Edward was crouching down with his face pressed close to the glass, trying to see the sails of a vessel we had watched struggling up the channel.

“‘Ah, poor fellows!’ nurse said; ‘it will be well if ever they get safe on land again. There’s many a poor wife will be a widow before to-morrow’s dawn, and many a poor babe fatherless.’

“‘Don’t talk like that, nurse,’ Edward cried, starting up

quite fiercely. 'The vessel was well managed, and she'll get safe to port.'

"Nurse shook her head, but only desired him to stand still while she brushed his hair, and then sent us down-stairs. I remember the wide black oak staircase, with gloomy old portraits frowning down from the walls, and the great hall dimly lighted with one small lamp; and how we glanced up at the windows against which the wind and rain were madly beating, half afraid of seeing something terrible looking in, holding each other very fast by the hand, till we came to a large heavy door, which Edward hastily opened. Within that door all was brightness and warmth. The room was not large, and a fire of logs blazed merrily on the hearth; the sound of the storm was muffled by the thick curtains that were drawn before the window, and four wax lights were burning in heavy silver sconces on the table, lighting up the gilded glass and rich dessert service in which my grandmother took pride. And seated in what almost seemed to me a chair of state, looking to my young eyes as grand and imposing as any queen, my grandmother held out her hands to welcome us.

"She was a tall old lady, more upright than anybody I have ever since seen, and she wore a tall cap, under whose frills the snow-white hair was combed back in smooth bands. Her dress was always black, very rich and shiny, and a quantity of delicate lace veiled her throat, and covered her to the chin. I seem to see the

beautiful white hands glittering with rings, and to feel their kindly grasp, for she loved us, though she was so grave and strict that we were somewhat afraid of her. She gave us fruit, and made us sip a little wine to our father's health, and then the old butler carried away the dessert, and we sat at the table looking at pictures, or talking to grandmamma, till nurse's knock summoned us to bed.

Such was the first day that I can remember, and such were many other days afterwards. The few old servants moved quietly about the house, and we two children acquired a hushed, still manner, that was not quite natural. Nurse taught us to read, and made me work at my needle. She was a good woman, and it was her example, even more than her words, which taught us to serve God. We knelt at her knee to say our prayers, and many a time she sang us to sleep with simple hymns that often come into my mind now when I lie awake at night. But I am afraid you must be tired, my dear children—you, especially, Harry, who are so much older than these children I have been describing."

"No, indeed!" resounded from all the young ones. "Please go on."

"Well then, I will tell you of an adventure Edward and I once had, though I cannot tell you how old we were at the time, clearly as I remember every circumstance. It came to our knowledge, I know not how, that in the old grey house there were some secret chambers hidden in the

roof. Our attempts to learn more were met with rebuffs on all sides, and it was a long time before we made any further discoveries. Indeed, I had almost forgotten the whole matter, but Edward, who was three or four years older, was not to be driven from his object. He had gone on peering and seeking, till he had discovered some rude steps, purposely made to look like accidental inequalities in the wall, and at the top of the ascent a door. For a long time the door resisted all his efforts, but he at length remembered to have seen a bunch of rusty keys in an old chest in the hall. Armed with these, he one day mounted the steps, tried key after key in the lock, found the right one, and threw open the door. I was waiting below, and needed no second invitation to follow him into the mysterious chamber."

"Oh! what was it like?" said Charlie.

"It was not very large, and but dimly lighted through a window partially covered with ivy. There was still a rude sort of bedstead in the corner, and an old table and wooden stool in the centre of the room; nothing else, except an empty cupboard. In a little room beyond, however, we were startled to find a rudely-carved crucifix hanging on the wall, and a table or altar beneath it, wrapped in some tapestry that had almost fallen to pieces. We were much bewildered by this discovery, and still more so when Edward accidentally pushed open a sliding panel in the wall, and there fell out a heap of robes embroidered in silk and gold, but sadly tarnished with damp. Long

afterwards we understood that these secret rooms had been used during the civil wars by the ancestors of my grandmother, when they were Roman Catholics, for the concealment of a priest, and that the little room where the crucifix was had been used for the celebration of their form of worship, when it was forbidden by the law of the land. The clothes we found were the priest's vestments, which had been left there unnoticed till Edward discovered them."

"How delighted you must have been!" said the Tomtit; "I wish we had a room in our roof."

They all laughed at such an idea, and Mrs. Charlton continued: "The worst of our discovery was, that we dared not mention it to anybody. We took the key off the bunch, that we might occasionally visit our chamber of mystery."

"It was like the blue chamber in Bluebeard's castle," observed Tomtit, solemnly.

"Not quite," answered Mrs. Charlton; "but it brought us into trouble at last."

"Oh, do tell us about it," said Charlie.



CHAPTER IV.

THE SECRET CHAMBER.

“**Q**UR usual time,” continued Mrs. Charlton, “for visiting what Edward called our chamber of mystery, was during the hour that nurse passed at her dinner. Our own meal was served to us in the nursery, at one o’clock, and, as soon as it was over, nurse went downstairs, leaving us to amuse ourselves. But it happened one day that she went out for the whole afternoon, bidding us be very good, and get into no mischief till she should return, which she meant to do in time to dress us for our dessert with grandmamma.

“So good an opportunity was not to be lost. No sooner was she gone than we repaired to the favourite spot, laden with sundry articles that were to be used in heightening the effect of a play we had long been wishing to act. I believe Edward was to represent Richard III. and I was to be Queen Margaret demanding her children ; but we were to begin with the murder of the young Princes, who were represented by two of my dolls. Edward had obtained

possession of a small sword, a dagger, and an old helmet, which generally hung in the hall, and, adorned with these, and with a scarf tied over his shoulder, he thought he looked 'every inch a king.' As for me, a gay chintz coverlet from one of the disused rooms was pinned round me for a train, and a wreath of real flowers, with a muslin blind by way of veil, completed my royal costume. Then there were the ragged old vestments I told you of, to deck the young Princes' bed, and there was a pillow with which to perform the smothering scene.

"Nothing could be more delightful than our play for some time, but at last we began to think it must be getting late, and probably nurse would soon be returning. It was cold, too, for our adventure happened in autumn, and the closely-shaded window let in but little sunshine at any time. Accordingly we gathered our goods together, and moved towards the door. Imagine our consternation when we found it tightly closed! We had left the key in the lock outside as was our custom, and the door just ajar, but to-day, either a gust of wind or our own movements had shut it, and we had no means of opening it again. I dropped all the things I was carrying in the extremity of my distress.

"'Oh, Edward, Edward!' I cried, 'we shall never, never get away from here. Nobody knows where we are—nobody will find us—what shall we do?'

"'Never mind,' Edward said, 'there's nothing to make a fuss about. It's the best fun in the world to be lost.

Don't you know what famous things always happen when people are lost? There was that Swiss family Robinson and ever so many more, and it all came right in the end.'

" 'But they were not shut up, Edward,' I argued. 'We are like poor little prisoners, only nobody knows we ever came here.'

" 'There, don't be silly, Maggie,' said Edward. 'By-and-by we shall hear somebody moving about the house, and then we'll shout and thump on the table, and they'll soon come and let us out. Let's go on playing now; it's no use sitting moping.'

"So we played, but even Edward no longer played with any spirit, and we were both, in reality, listening for sounds of some one moving in the house. Besides, it grew dark apace, and it was very cold. At last I began again to talk of my fears, and Edward answered less cheerfully.

" 'Don't you think nurse must be come home?' he said. 'Let us try to make a great noise; you shriek out loud, and so will I, and let us beat against the door with all our might.'

"We did so for a few minutes, then paused to listen breathlessly, but there was no sound in reply—nothing but a dull, regular beating that came, we knew, from the clock-tower, and seemed to grow louder and louder as the darkness increased. Presently the bell swung out the hour with a dull, heavy sound. We counted the strokes: it was seven o'clock. Nurse must be at home now, looking for us. Once more we screamed and rapped at the door,

then paused, half-frightened at our own noise. Hand in hand, we sat down on the bedstead, where the dolls still lay, smothered under the pillow. We were very cold and hungry, and I had begun to cry, while Edward had no spirit left to cheer me.

“No doubt that room had purposely been placed where no sound from it should be likely to attract the attention of anybody in the house. At any rate, no notice was taken of our din, and we had not courage to try it again. There we sat clinging to each other, hearing the dull tick-tock of the turret-clock, till the bell swung out another hour. It was quite dark, and we hardly dared to speak, but when the sound of the bell died away Edward whispered, ‘They must be looking for us now. How frightened grandmamma will be! I wish we could hear somebody moving.’

“‘Oh, Edward!’ I said, ‘do you think it was wrong of us to come here, and never tell nurse about it? I am afraid we ought to have told her.’

“‘No use to think of that now, Maggie. Hark! what’s that?’

“It was something flitting past us in the dark, something that touched us with its wing, and made us scream with fear; but my brother soon recovered himself.

“‘Don’t be frightened, Maggie,’ he said, still in a whisper—‘it must be a bat; they can come in through the hole in the window.’

“I do not think I was much comforted, but I tried not to scream when the rushing sound came again. Presently

there was a fresh noise—sharp, busy teeth grinding at the wainscot.

“ ‘Only mice,’ whispered Edward again ; but I caught up my feet from the floor, fancying I felt the little creatures galloping over them. Nine o’clock struck, and soon after there was a pale glimmer, which enabled us to see where the window was. We crept towards it, and saw the full moon through the ivy—a blessed sight to us two poor frightened children. We caught a glimpse, too, of people moving in the garden below, and, emboldened by the moonlight, we shouted aloud, but in vain. Even our shrill young voices could not be heard so far. Still, we no longer felt so lonely when we had seen those people seeking us, as we believed, and the bats and mice had lost much of their terror.

“ ‘I am very hungry and very tired, Edward,’ I said.

“ ‘Then you shall go to sleep, Maggie, and I will watch you,’ he said. ‘Lie down on the bed, and let me cover you up with some of those old things.’

“He led me back towards the old bedstead, and then I stopped, and said, ‘We have not said our prayers to-night.’

“ ‘Let us say them now,’ answered Edward ; and we knelt down and repeated our usual prayers, and then added a few words in reference to our present distress, begging that God would let us be found by our friends before we were starved. Then Edward made me lie down, and wrapped me in the strange old garments we had used in

our play, saying, as he did so,—‘You won’t mind now, Maggie; it was worse for Daniel with the Lions, and he got out quite safe, you know. You go to sleep, and I’ll be your true knight and watch you.’

“‘I believe I was soon asleep, and my true knight very soon afterwards; but a few hours later, I was awakened by a cry of alarm from him; and starting up, I saw in the dim light a white face with a pair of dark eyes, peering in at the window. I felt quite stiff and cold with fear, but presently a heavy flapping of wings made us know that this was only a great white owl that lived with his family in the ivy of the clock-tower. It was a long time before we could go to sleep again, though poor Edward was too tired now to talk of watching. When we did fall asleep we had a long nap, from which we woke only when the sun was high. We looked piteously at each other, not in a humour to laugh, as we should have done under happier circumstances, at the strange appearance we presented—Edward with his scarf, and I in my queenly robes, both with faces smeared with crying. However, the morning brought us hope, and again we battered the door and screamed for nurse; then, finding no one answered, we went to the window. We saw a man come up to the house, then we heard the sound of a window opening, and a voice that seemed like grandmamma’s calling out,—‘Have you any news?’

“‘No, ma’am, not yet,’ the man said.

“Almost before he had spoken, Edward had caught up

the old helmet, and flung it with all his force from the broken window. It whirled round in the air and fell at the man's feet, evidently to his astonishment. He looked up and down and around, then picked it up, and exclaimed,—‘Where in the world does it come from? It seemed to fall from the clouds.’

“In another moment grandmamma’s tall, stately figure stood beside him. She, too, looked up and down and around; then clasping her hands, cried out,—‘Have you looked in the secret chamber? Where is the key? The children must be there!’

“In a very few minutes we were released from our prison, warmed and fed, and forgiven, but neither Edward nor I could ever forget the miseries of that night. Grandmamma did not scold us, but when nurse told us that she and grandmamma had not been to bed at all, but had wandered out in the night to look for us, we felt very sorry for what we had done, and determined to have no more secrets.”

“Did you ever go up to that room any more?” inquired Charlie.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Charlton; “but I think it was more pain than pleasure to us, after that terrible night, especially to me. Edward, who was ten years old, went to school soon afterwards, and then it was only during his holidays that we got into any mischief.”

“Do tell us if you remember any more of the mischievous things you did,” said Gerty.

"There was an old church not far from the grey house," continued Mrs. Charlton, "with a square belfry-tower, in which hung eight powerful bells, that chimed a melancholy tune at every third hour of day and night. Edward took a strange interest in these bells, and made acquaintance with the old sexton, who was always hanging about the church, that he might get into the tower when the bells were ringing. During the first holidays he spent at home, I followed him like a shadow, and was only too ready to do his bidding. I cannot tell you how many hours we passed in that old church, peering into mouldy recesses, visiting hidden corners, and watching the sunbeams glide through the coloured windows, and fall with a bright stain on the pavement. Then we knew every monument, from the old brasses on which were engraved the stiff figures of husband and wife, each with a little row of children behind it, to the latest marble image of grief leaning over an urn. We read and re-read all the inscriptions, till, with the old sexton's help, we had made out the family history of many of the people we knew by sight. We looked into the prayer-books in the pews, to find out names and relationships—in short, nothing was safe from our childish curiosity. Sometimes, while we were roaming about the sacred building, with idle thoughts in our minds, the organist would come in to practise, and as the notes swelled fuller and fuller, they would rouse a better spirit within us, and we would listen with hushed breath till they ceased, and then creep home very subdued and still.

Now and then, in the dusk, when the day's work was over, the choristers would come in to try a new chant or hymn ; and no music I have since heard has ever seemed to me so glorious as those voices seemed then. I did not feel frightened, after hearing them, to run home through the lanes, even with the prospect of nurse scolding us for being out so late.

"One day, instead of going into the church, Edward led me up the rough stairs into the belfry-tower. Higher and higher we mounted, till we reached the top, where hung the eight huge bells ; then still up by some ladders till we were among the beams which stretched across the tower between the bells, and along these we walked steadily enough, till suddenly the hour of three struck, and then the chimes began to play. The great bells swung and clashed out the tune (it was 'Life let us cherish,' I remember)—now here, now there, rose the stunning din, while I stood dizzy and terrified on the narrow beam, not daring to stir, my cries drowned in the crash of metal. It stopped at last, and when I recovered myself, Edward was speaking.

"'You look dazed, Maggie,' he said. 'I thought you'd like it as much as I do. Isn't it grand to hear the old bells ? Now come this way, and I'll show you something more.'

"I followed, as I was accustomed to do, and preceded by the sexton, we mounted another ladder, and found ourselves on the roof of the tower, sloping downward toward

the four walls, without any rail or protection whatever. I felt my head swim, and clutched Edward's hand, as I felt the strong breeze sweep by, and fancied it must carry me away with it, to fling me down on the grass a long, long way below.

" 'Don't be a coward, Maggie,' said my brother. 'I'll hold you fast. Look out there.'

"I looked in the direction to which he pointed, and recognised the grey house and the garden.

" 'Oh,' I cried, shrinking back, 'I see grandmamma standing there. Do come home, Edward. I am sure she would not like us to be here.'

"He consented to come, and, after a perilous descent, we went at once to the garden, where we found grandmamma looking up at the church-tower with her glass. When she saw us, she said, 'Have you seen anything on the tower, my dears? I am sure I saw something white up there a few minutes ago, fluttering like a bird's wing. I thought it was a gull, but I have not seen it fly away, though I cannot make out anything now. Look with your young eyes.'

"As she spoke, she turned towards us, and either my blushing, downcast face, or my white frock blowing in the wind, wakened her suspicions, and she exclaimed, 'Surely, it is not possible! Edward, Maggie, do you know what it was I saw? Oh, Edward, surely you would not so risk your little sister's life? Speak, children!'

"Grandmamma leant back on the garden-seat, where we

had found her, quite pale and trembling, but Edward spoke out bravely : 'I see I have done very wrong, grandmamma. I did take Maggie up there, but I will never do so again. I came to tell you, even if you had not asked me, because I felt I was very wrong. Do forgive me, grandmamma.'

" 'Thank God, you are safe !' she said, with a deep sigh of relief. 'I am glad I did not suspect what it was that I saw fluttering there. For the future, you must never go out of the garden and field without my leave. I cannot speak of the danger you have run, children ;' and she shuddered as she spoke, and drew us close to her. 'Never, never do so again !'

" We kissed her and promised ; and so ended another of my adventures."

There were many thanks offered to Mrs. Charlton for her stories, and then came an unwelcome summons from home to the Elvingtons, who were obliged to depart without delay, consoled with the hope held out by Mrs. Charlton of another happy evening with her before many days should have passed.



CHAPTER V.

HARRY'S CHOICE.

THE next day was Sunday, the very last day of the Easter holidays. Gertrude and Harry went early to the school at Coleham, each to take a class of very small children, and teach them such knowledge as they were able to give and the children to receive. This was not much, perhaps ; but it was pleasant to be of some use, and Gerty's little pupils were fond of her, and brought her many a bunch of double daisies or wild violets in token of their goodwill. Harry's class of small boys were apt to yawn and fidget, and had no particular love of learning ; still they had improved a little in the last six months, and that was encouraging to the young teacher. The bells were ringing gaily when the rest of the family set forth on their way to church, Charlie and Bessie first, and Captain and Mrs. Elvington following, with Tomtit between them, gravely carrying a large prayer-book. They had about half a mile to walk, half the distance along the high road, and the other half through the

straggling little town. Many a nod, or smile, or kindly word they exchanged with young and old whom they passed on their way, women in scarlet cloaks, and men in their clean smock-frocks leading their families to church, and all rejoicing that "winter was over and gone."

"Bessie," said Charlie, as he trudged beside her, "did you notice what papa and mamma said about the rock-work? I wonder when we shall know what's going to happen."

"I am afraid it's nothing very good," said Bessie, "for mamma seems sad and anxious. Do you think papa can be going away again?"

"I never thought of that; it's such a little while since he came home. That would be bad news indeed. It is so different when he's at home;" and, with a sober step and clouded brow, Charlie pursued his way till he caught sight of the Charltons walking on before him. He brightened up then, and quickened his pace to join them.

In the afternoon, however, he was reminded of Bessie's foreboding, by hearing Captain Elvington call Harry to take a walk, and being told, when he proposed to join the party, that his father wished to talk to Harry alone.

"He must be going to tell Harry," observed Charlie to his sister. "Whatever it is, you know, papa must be going to tell him now; for Harry never needs any scolding. If it was me, it would be different."

Harry and his father walked for some distance across the common in silence, then Captain Elvington stopped

and said, "Are you still of the same mind about your profession, my boy? It must be settled now."

"Yes, papa," the boy answered, steadily. "I have never wished to change. I have worked very hard at mathematics. Indeed, papa, Mr. Butler will tell you so."

"I know you are a good, steady, hard-working fellow, Harry, and you shall have your way. You have chosen the same profession that I chose at your age, but from very different motives. It was the dash and the danger and the wild risk of war that tempted me; perhaps, too, the idea of getting away from my books. The scientific branch of the service would have had few charms for me, I confess. Day after day in a boat under a tropical sun, or in a cutting breeze, measuring, sounding, mapping down a coast, inch by inch. I should never have had patience for it, Harry; are you sure you have?"

"I think so, papa. I like the thoughts of it."

"Well, then, there is no more to be said. You shall go into the navy; but not for two years yet. Meantime, I am hourly expecting an appointment. My ship is in the Mediterranean, and I shall join her there. I shall take you with me, and your mother will come to Malta with the rest of the family in the autumn. You will see something of your future profession, and work hard, I can tell you; but there must be no change in your decision. I can give you till Tuesday to think of it, if you like, for there is no post from London to-morrow, and I cannot get my orders till the next day."

"Thank you, papa ; but my mind has been made up a long time. I shall not wish to change. It is what I have always intended."

"Then there is no more to be said," replied Captain Elvington ; "only you must be prepared to go in a very few days. There is a steamer waiting at Plymouth, in which I shall probably be ordered a passage, and I think she will sail at the end of this week."

The time was very short, and as they walked on in silence, Harry's heart grew rather heavy, in spite of the prospect now before him of the fulfilment of his dearest hopes. He was a quiet boy of very good abilities, very fond of study ; and his wish to be of the same profession with his father had always been combined with a desire to carry out his favourite pursuits to their utmost extent. An acquaintance with some officers who had been employed in the surveying department had made him of late more than ever anxious to enter the navy, and now the future seemed to promise all that he wished. Still there was the parting with his mother, the leaving home, and brothers and sisters ; even to turn his back on the old house he had always lived in, and the little town where he had gone to school, and the dear old common on which he had run and played as long as he could remember ;—the thoughts of all these farewells pained him more than he expected. When he returned home, and his mother, who had been watching for him, put her arm gently round his neck, and, looking into his face with the kind, patient

smile he knew so well, said, 'Well, my dear son, is it all settled?' he fairly broke from her grasp, rushed up to his room, and threw himself on his bed to have a good cry.

When the dinner-bell rang, Charlie was doomed to fresh torments of curiosity, since Harry appeared with red eyes and a generally swollen appearance about the face, as if he had been crying. It was a most unusual circumstance, for Harry was so steady he never got into trouble; and on this occasion his father and mother were almost more than usually kind to him, so he could not have been doing anything wrong. Gerty was so busy in supplying Tomtit with the many things he required at dinner, that she scarcely noticed anybody else; and Bessie, who sat next to Harry, seeing he had been unhappy and not troubling herself about the cause, showed him all the little attentions she could, and was so eager to give him the largest tart in the dish before her, that she upset all the rest on the cloth, and was covered with confusion.

At dessert there was some talk of the stories Mrs. Charlton had told them on the previous evening, and Charlie remarked, "It must be good fun to go about the world. Fred told me his mother had been in all the four great continents—Europe, Asia, Africa, and America."

"So have I," said Captain Elvington, smiling; "and in a fifth to boot—Australia."

"Ah, yes, papa, but then you're a sailor, and I don't want to be a sailor. I'd rather be a soldier."

"Well, you may have a chance of seeing the world as a soldier, or even before you become one. Would you like to come to Malta next autumn? I should not wonder if mamma and your sisters and Tomtit were to make the voyage; and if you promise to be useful, perhaps they may allow you to be of the party."

"Are you in earnest, papa? Where will you go then? and Harry?" cried Charlie; then, clapping his hands, he exclaimed, "I know! I know! I've guessed it! You're going to have a ship, and Harry is going with you!"

Captain Elvington nodded, the girls and Tomtit made an exclamation that had more in it of dismay than joy, and their mother bent her head very low, as if to hide her tears. Charlie's exultation was checked, and his face lengthened considerably.

"I see," said he. "Of course you will have to go away. Poor mamma! Oh! I'm sorry, papa. We've been so happy since you came home."

"Never mind, Charlie," said his father, holding out his hand. "We cannot always be together, and I hope we shall all meet again very soon. Remember, I expect you to give your mother as little trouble as possible, and to be kind to your sisters. Let me have a good report of you when we all meet again, as I hope we shall do in November or December. Gerty, you are the eldest, and you can be of great use to your mother, and I am sure you will do your best. As to my quiet little Bessie, she will

help everybody as much as she can, and Tomtit will be a very good boy."

The last words were too much for poor Tomtit's feelings. While his father had been speaking, the corners of his mouth had descended lower and lower, and when he heard his own name, he could contain himself no longer, but burst forth into loud weeping, mingled with assurances that he *was* good, and *would be* good, and never *could* be naughty any more. The whole family devoted themselves to the task of consoling him, and, in doing so, called to mind so many reasons for being cheerful, that they were much the better for their efforts, and agreed for the future to look only on the bright side of the matter.



CHAPTER VI.

THE LITTLE BOY WHO WENT TO LOOK FOR THE FAIRIES.

THERE was no going to school, nor were there any lessons at home, after all, for the Elvingtons on Monday. There was hurrying to and fro to find Harry's books, to look out his clothes, and separate them from his brother's, to mend holes, and sew on buttons; this was done by the young ones, while their mother was busied in preparing Captain Elvington's wardrobe; and the occupation was good for them all.

On Tuesday morning the large letter, with its inscription "*On her Majesty's Service*," arrived as expected, and Captain Elvington was obliged to go up to London. He returned on Thursday; the packing was hurried, for on Saturday morning he and Harry must depart. As little as possible was left to be done on Friday, that they might all spend the day together; but, unluckily, a drizzling rain fell incessantly, and the hours of that last day dragged on sadly enough.

A little wood fire was welcome in the evening, and they

all gathered round it, with an oppressive sense of the morrow's parting weighing on their spirits. Captain Elvington tried to cheer them, but the laughter his jokes produced was apt this night to end in something very like a sob ; and all the party crept wearily to bed even earlier than the usual hour.

Harry was alone in his little room. He had been round to all his acquaintances, rich and poor, to bid them farewell, and he was tired and sad. He thought of his mother, how night after night, as long as he could remember, she had come into his room for a last good-night ; how once he used to believe he could not go to sleep without her kiss. Home seemed dearer than ever ; it was very hard to go away. He covered his face with his hands, and sobbed ; but a kind touch an instant afterwards roused him, and his mother sat down beside him.

"Dear old Harry, my steady, brave boy," she said, in her gentlest tone ; "you must not give way now. I depend upon you to take my place, and look after papa's comfort. You will write to me all about him, won't you ?"

He had drawn her arm round his neck, and now he looked into her face with a smile, and said, "Indeed you may trust me, mother. Just for a minute I broke down at the thoughts of you. I hope I shall not disappoint you."

"I do not think you will, Harry. I am full of hope for you, and you have been a good and dutiful son."

"It was such a help, mother, to have you here always," Harry said, with a sigh ; "I could not vex you, especially

when papa was away. But I shan't have you to look to now, and of course, papa won't be able to attend to me very much. I feel as if I should have nothing to trust to."

"Don't say that, my dear Harry. There will be One always near who is strong to help. I will not say try to be like your father, though God knows how thankful I shall be if my boys are, by-and-by, as true and good Christian men as he is, as unselfish and generous, and sincere and kind. But I know your dear father himself would wish me to tell you to look to a higher Example, to Him who was once a boy on this earth, tried and tempted, but without sin; humble and subject to His parents as He bids His followers to be. Never forget Him, Harry, and you will need no other help against evil."

There were a few more loving words between the mother and son, and then Mrs. Elvington left him, soothed and comforted, to sleep for the last time under the roof of his dear old home. He was roused early by his father's step on the stairs, and the family were soon assembled round the breakfast-table. It was a grey, chilly morning, but without rain, and there were hopes of sunshine later in the day. Already a fly was at the door, and the luggage was being piled on its roof during the hurried meal. A few jokes with which Captain Elvington endeavoured to cheer his family fell rather flat, and the rest scarcely spoke. At last the servant announced the fly was ready, and Captain Elvington started up.

"Come, Harry, my boy, not a moment to lose! We shall

all have a merry meeting at Malta, please God, before the winter. Tomtit shall pluck the oranges off the trees himself."

There was a rush for coats and umbrellas, and confusion of embracing, and crying, and kissing, and then a heavy stillness, and the children found themselves standing in the middle of the road before the garden-gate, gazing at the departing carriage as it disappeared like a black speck over the bend of the hill. Very dull and spiritless they felt as they turned to re-enter the house. Gerty went to look for her mother, in her earnest wish to be of use and do what papa had told her. Mrs. Elvington was very pale and tired, and Gerty persuaded her to lie down, while she herself sat near her with a book. The three other children felt very forlorn, and Tomtit was in a state of depression never before witnessed. Poor little Bessie knew not what to do with him, as he constantly asked to go to his mother; and Bessie knew Mrs. Elvington had been up most of the previous night, and really required rest. Charlie was too doleful to help anybody.

"Come, Tomtit," said Bessie, almost in despair, "will you be quiet if I tell you a story?"

"Ah, that'll do, Bessie," Charlie answered for his brother. "I'm sure we want something rather cheerful."

Bessie settled herself in a large arm-chair, with poor Tomtit in the corner behind her, and Charlie on a stool at her feet, and proceeded to relate the "Adventures of a little Boy who went to look for the Fairies."

"Once upon a time there was a little boy named Frank, who lived in a house on the edge of a forest. The house stood by itself, and was a very pretty one ; and there was a nice large garden round it, besides a shrubbery and a field where Frank used to walk. Now this little Frank was a very lonely little boy, for he had no brothers and sisters, and his mamma was dead. His father came home now and then, but very often he was away for months at a time."

"Like our papa," observed Tomtit, with a sob.

"Yes ; but he was not like our papa in other things," said Bessie. "When he came home, he did not talk much to his little boy, but left him at all times very much to the care of his nurse. Now the nurse was very kind and good-natured to Frank, but she was not a very wise woman. She used to try to make him as happy as she could, but, as he had never had any playfellows, he had never learnt to play at ball or to run races, as we do. He only took quiet walks, holding his nurse's hand, round the garden, or through the shrubbery, or across the field. Day after day, it was just the same, and Frank would have been very tired of his walks except for one reason. It was nurse's custom, in order to make Frank more willing to take his exercise out-of-doors, to tell him stories while they were walking. She meant to be very kind, but, as I told you, she was not very wise, so the stories she told him were not very wise either ; and the worst of it was, that she was so ignorant as to believe them herself, or,

at any rate, a great many of them. She told him about fairy people living in caves and hollows, and sometimes coming out to dance in the moonlight; and when Frank asked if it was really true there were such things, she said, 'Yes, she had seen the marks on the grass where their little feet had danced; and, indeed, her great uncle had seen them dancing one moonlight night.' Poor little Frank thought all nurse told him must be quite true, for she did not explain to him that there were fancy stories made up sometimes just to amuse children; so at last he began to believe that, outside of the great gates which he had never been allowed to pass, there was a very wonderful world indeed, full of giants and fairies and flying horses and enchanted castles. By degrees, there grew up in his mind a very great wish to go and see these wonders, at the same time that he was afraid both to disobey his nurse and also to go beyond the garden alone.

It happened one morning that nurse had left him sitting on a garden-seat, while she went to speak to a friend in the kitchen. He was just opposite to the gates, and he saw that whoever had last come in had left one gate ajar. At once he got up from his seat, and went to the gate and opened it just so wide that he could creep through, and as it swung close again he felt a strange thrill, half of joy and half of fear. He sat down for awhile on a large stone by the gate-post, and looked about him. He was on the high-road; before him was a strip of smooth grass, and beyond it the wood he had often seen

from his nursery windows. It was very tempting—no hedges, no ditches—and in a few minutes he might be in the wood. He began to reflect, and found plenty of reasons, as we most of us do, for doing what he wished.

“‘Why,’ he thought, ‘was he never allowed to go outside of that great, ugly gate? Why should he not go and play in the wood? Perhaps, in reality, he was a little prince, and somebody had shut him up in an enchanted house, and nurse was a wicked old fairy—and yet she was very good-natured to him. Still, he should like to see what was in the wood!’ While he was thinking, he looked at the tall trees and saw the boughs bending and bowing in the wind, so that they seemed inviting him to come nearer. He rose up and said, ‘I will come,’ and in a very few minutes he had crossed the sunny piece of grass and entered the cool green shade of the wood. There was a narrow little path winding, like a brown thread, in and out among the trees; and in the grass and weeds on each side of it were so many gaily-coloured flowers, that Frank could have fancied the fairies had been scattering jewels there. However, he soon put out his hand to grasp them, and found, to his joy, that they were real sweet flowers—blue-bells and cowslips and red-tipped daisies. He ran to and fro till he had picked as many as he could carry, and when he looked about him afterwards he could not see any opening to the wood, or guess which way he had come into it. This did not trouble him, for the green leaves made a beautiful roof over his head, and the winding path still

tempted him forward. On he went, till he came to a stream of water, half-hidden with cresses and forget-me-nots, singing along over the pebbles: the sound reminded him he was thirsty, and he stooped down, made a cup of his little hand, and drank the cool water. Then he sat on the root of an old oak to rest himself and hear the birds singing in the branches. Presently something hit him sharply on the head, and he started up, thinking some fairy was beginning to pelt him with acorns; but when he looked up in the tree, he saw a bright pair of black eyes peering at him, and found it was only a frightened squirrel that had dropped an acorn-cup at sight of him. Frank clapped his hands, and the squirrel scampered up to the highest bough.

"The little boy crossed the stream on the trunk of a tree that was laid across for a bridge, and walked on for some time without any adventure. He began, by-and-by, to feel tired, and was tempted to lie down on some dry grass near the path. Here he fell asleep; he woke with a start of alarm, for he heard something move, and when he opened his eyes a large creature covered with black curly hair was sniffing all round him. Frank's first thought was that this black creature with its great white teeth must be the very same wolf that ate little Red Riding Hood, so he lay still, hardly able to breathe for fear; and presently the monster left him, and trotted quietly away. It was only a farmer's sheep dog taking a quiet stroll, so Frank need not have been afraid.

"He could not tell how long he had been asleep, but he

began to feel as if he wanted his dinner. He did not know which was the way home, so he took the turning that seemed the prettiest, and away he went again. The path led to an open space in the wood, in front of a castle, with a low wall before it. The castle had four small towers, and was altogether so like the description nurse had given of Bluebeard's own castle, that Frank looked up on the highest part of the roof, expecting to see Sister Anne waving her handkerchief. Seeing nobody there, he began to fear Bluebeard might be at home, so he crept along close under the wall, hoping to pass without being seen. While he was there, he heard voices on the other side of the wall, and presently a lady said, 'Anne, have you brought the keys?'

"Another lady's voice answered, 'Yes; here they are. This is the one you want. Let us go and look at them now.'

"Frank shook like a leaf, for he thought the ladies he heard must be Mrs. Bluebeard and Sister Anne, talking about going to the blue closet; while, in reality, they were a lady and her daughter going to visit their favourite fowls. He hurried past the castle, and was soon in the wood on the other side, where he found a broad road with deep ruts in it, as if heavy carts had been there but lately. He had not gone far along the road, when he saw a large black bird hopping gravely along towards him. He stopped, but the bird advanced till it was quite close, then, with its head on one side, fixed its eye on Frank's face, and said, distinctly, 'What's o'clock?'

“‘This must be an enchanted bird,’ thought Frank, ‘and I must be civil to him or he may hurt me;’ so he took off his cap, made a bow, and said :

“‘Indeed, sir, I don’t know. I’m a poor little boy that has never been here before, but I think it must be late, for I’m very hungry.’

“The bird seemed to listen to all he said, then it hopped about a little, and said, ‘What’s your will?’

“‘I came into the wood, sir,’ continued Frank, bowing again, ‘to look for the fairies. I believe they dance in the evening, and I want to see them very much. Could you tell me about them, sir?’

“The bird looked up and down, hopped about a little, and then said, ‘Come along,’ as he turned round and began hopping along the road.

Frank followed, quite persuaded that this was the wonderful talking bird which nurse said had turned into a young prince; and he wondered where the bird was going to lead him, and hoped it might be to the house of the White Cat who used to give such very good dinners to her visitors. The road, however, only led to a small farmhouse with a farmyard beside it, where a cross-looking woman was milking a cow. The bird hopped into the yard, and began picking up a grain of corn here and there, left by the chickens, and took no further notice of Frank. The poor little boy went up to the woman and began to tell her he was hungry.

“‘What a start you gave me, to be sure!’ she exclaimed;

'I never heard you coming, you little beggar-boy! Go along with you as fast as you can. I believe it was you and your companions that stole my eggs out of the nest last week. Go away at once!'

"'Indeed, ma'am,' said Frank, 'I never came here before, and I am really very hungry.'

"'There, don't stand answering me!' she cried, in a loud harsh voice; 'I'll set the dog on you, if you don't run off at once.'

"A great dog at this moment came out of his kennel close by, shook himself till his great chain rattled loudly, and then began to bark. Away ran Frank as fast as his legs could carry him, and he did not stop till he was far in the wood again. He wished he was safe at home, for the world outside the gates was not so pleasant as he had expected. By-and-by, as he trudged wearily along, he heard a merry voice singing, and presently he saw a little girl sitting on the ground, with a lump of bread in her hand. He stood still and watched her break off a piece and crumble it, and then scatter the crumbs on the ground, singing all the time. When she had finished doing this, she looked up and saw Frank, and smiled. He came nearer.

"'Are you hungry, little boy?' she asked.

"'Very,' he said, in a sad voice.

"'Take my supper then,' said the little girl, cheerily; 'you are quite welcome.'

"He took it very gratefully, and was sorry that, while he



Frank in the Farmyard



was eating, a voice called 'Susie !' and the little girl ran away before he had had time to ask her where she lived. However, the food refreshed him, and he observed with pleasure that the sun must be near setting, as the shadows were getting darker. Suddenly, through an opening between the trees, he caught a glimpse of dark purple mountains with a broad golden path below them ; this gave him fresh courage.

" 'That must be fairy-land,' he said to himself ; 'no other place could be so beautiful. It does not seem very far off, and if I walk fast I may get there before it is quite dark.'

So on and on he went, still through the wood, keeping the purple mountains in sight, when suddenly, in the path before him, he saw a lovely little lady, hardly so large as himself, coming towards him, riding on a pony as white as snow. The lady was dressed in green shining velvet, and on her head was a green cap with long, drooping white feathers. Her hair hung down like threads of gold ; her blue eyes were soft and kind ; and she guided her pony with a silken rein, held in the tiniest little hands that ever were seen. Frank at once moved out of the path to make way for her, feeling sure it was the Queen of the Fairies on her way from the purple mountains. She nodded to him as she passed, and then looked back and blew through a silver whistle ; and out of the bushes came a little white dog, whose silky ears and long hair swept the grass as he ran after his mistress. They were

soon out of sight, to Frank's sorrow ; and then he thought he would try to follow, as no doubt the queen must be going to dance with the rest of the fairies. So he turned to follow her, and came by-and-by to a hill covered with short grass, on which he saw circles of a darker-coloured grass than the rest, and he knew these must be the fairy-rings he had heard nurse talk about, and he supposed the dark circles were marks of the fairies' dancing-feet. So he sat down on the top of the hill to wait, and looked about him to see in which direction were the purple mountains. Alas ! the golden road was gone, and the purple mountains were now only dark heavy clouds. The little boy's heart sank till he thought again of the beautiful queen, and then he was content to wait while the twilight faded into night, and the stars came peeping out over his head. Still the queen did not come. Once he heard feet moving in the wood close by, but as he turned to look a little fawn dashed across the hill below him, and disappeared again among the trees. Once he thought he saw a tiny creature moving in the shadow of some tall fern-leaves just on the edge of the hill ; but when he looked steadily it was only a white-faced rabbit rubbing its nose with its soft little paws, and in another minute it pricked up its long ears and darted into its hole. All was so still at last that even the dropping of a leaf startled Frank, and he began to think the fairies were not coming, and to wish he was not alone.

“Again he began to walk, very slowly and wearily this

time; but after awhile he saw a red light gleam a long way off, and he made for it as straight as the trees and briars would let him. He found it came from a wood-fire on which a kettle was boiling, while five or six black, hairy men were lying on the ground round it, smoking pipes and talking in loud, hoarse voices. They saw him and called to him, or he would hardly have had courage to come near.

“‘Why, what new sort of game is this in the wood to-night?’ said one of them, taking Frank by the arm and holding him so that the fire-light fell on his face. ‘Poor little chap! I believe it’s a kind of rabbit. Give him some food. Here, sit down, child, and don’t shake so. Who are ye?’

“‘My name’s Frank, and I came out to look for the fairies,’ answered the little boy, ‘but I only saw the queen. There has been no dancing to-night.’

“The man who had spoken looked at his comrades and tapped his forehead, saying, ‘Poor little chap! Touched in the head, mayhap. I dare say, though, he knows the way to his mouth, so give him some supper.’

“One of them took the lid off the pot that was on the fire and ladled out a savoury mess into a wooden bowl, which was handed to Frank, with a horn spoon. The rough men looked on with a grin while he eagerly ate this welcome meal. When he had done he looked round and saw all eyes on him, and a pleased look on every face. ‘What could be the meaning of it?’ he thought. ‘Who

could these people be? They must be giants, only they were very kind to give him food when he was so hungry. Perhaps, though, they only wanted to fatten him before they ate him up!’ This was a dreadful thought!

“ ‘Well, little one,’ said the one who had spoken before, and who was the biggest of them all, ‘do ye feel better after that? You don’t look quite so much like a starved rabbit now.’

Frank looked into the large merry face, and took courage to ask, ‘Please, sir, are you giants?’

The whole party burst into a loud laugh, and rolled on the ground in their mirth, and the biggest answered, ‘To be sure, we be giants, little one. Fee, faw, fum! I eat little boys when I’m hungry, nicely stewed up with mushrooms!’

“They all laughed again till the wood rang with the noise, and when they were quiet once more the same man said, ‘Come, little one, lie down here and go to sleep, for you’re tired, and I’ll take ye home in the morning, if you’re not a fairy yourself.’

“Frank obeyed, trembling and miserable, and the man covered him up kindly with his own coat, and then began to eat his supper with his companions. Their loud voices and rude jokes frightened the little boy more and more, and he could not sleep; but at last they all lay down too, except one, who seemed to have something to do at a little distance, watching a heap from which smoke was rising. Frank watched his opportunity, and crept away without

notice farther and farther from the terrible giants, who, after all, were only rough, good-natured charcoal-burners, meaning nothing but kindness.

"He came at length to a little cottage, and, creeping softly to the low window, he looked in and saw a wrinkled old woman sitting by the hearth with a black cat beside her. He was half inclined to tap on the pane and ask to be taken in; but he was afraid this might be a wicked fairy, so he waited a little while; and then the old woman got up, moved to the door, and looked out, and the cat purring round her, trotted out on the door-step. The old woman looked towards the wood and shook her head, then said aloud, 'Come, puss, come in again. I'm afeared Jem won't come home to-night. It's no use waiting.' Just then she caught sight of Frank. 'Why, what have we here?' she said, stepping up to him. 'A little child abroad at this time of night, and all alone too? Come in my poor little one, and tell me where you come from.'

"She led him into her hut, shut the door, and seated him on a wooden stool by the fire, while she sat down again in her arm-chair, and the black cat stretched himself on the hearth.

" 'Now tell me who you are,' said the old woman. 'Your clothes are torn and soiled; have you come far, and where are your parents?'

" 'I'm Frank,' answered the little boy; 'I live with nurse always, and sometimes papa. I came to look for the fairies, and I saw the beautiful queen. Then I saw

some giants, and they gave me some supper, but I ran away, because I thought they would eat me.'

" 'Why, bless the child !' said the old woman, 'he must be crazy. Where can he be come from? Which way did you come, my dear?'

" 'I came by Bluebeard's castle,' answered Frank, 'and I met the enchanted bird, only he did not turn into a prince.'

" 'Poor little thing !' said the old woman ; 'he's as mad as a March hare. Do you know your way home?'

" 'No,' said Frank, blinking at the fire, for he was very sleepy. 'It's a long way off, and there's an enchanted gate that hardly ever opens, and nurse is a bad fairy—no, a good fairy, I mean ;' and as he spoke his head fell on the old woman's lap, and he was fast asleep.

" 'Bless him, poor foolish little fellow !' she said kindly ; and then she lifted him up and laid him down on her own bed, covering him up so gently that he never opened his eyes. She sat down again in her chair, read for awhile out of a large book, and then dozed through the night. When morning dawned, she woke, looked at the little boy, who was still sleeping, and moved softly about the cottage, getting out her little teapot, two teacups and a tin mug, a coarse brown loaf and a brown jar of butter. Then she went out to the well and filled her kettle, and set it on the fire, swept up the hearth, and made everything comfortable. Just as she finished, the door opened, and a man came in,

“‘Ah, Jem,’ she said, ‘I’m glad you’re come. I thought to see you last night.’

“‘So you would, mother ; only when I got up to come to you, I missed a poor little crazy boy that came to us while we were at supper. We fed him and put him to sleep, with my coat over him, but when I went to call him, to bring the poor little creature home to you, he was gone, and all night long I’ve been up and down the wood looking for him. I should grieve if he got into trouble.’

“The old woman took her son by the arm, led him to the bedside, and showed him Frank still asleep.

“‘Why, mother,’ said Jem, ‘wherever did you find him?’

She told him, and then they sat down to their meal, and talked of the poor child. When they had done, Jem took the tin mug, and said, ‘I’ll go to the big house, and ask for a drop of milk for the child, and some white bread.’

“When Frank woke, the old woman was standing by the bed with a mug full of sweet bread-and-milk for him. He jumped up, quite bewildered, especially when he saw the giant Jem standing in the room too.

“‘Don’t be fearsome, little one,’ said the old woman. ‘Jem’s my son, and as good a son as a mother need wish to have. He’s been out to get thee this nice bread-and-milk. Eat it, poor child.’

“Frank ate, as he was desired, feeling less and less afraid of Jem. When he had finished, the old woman brought a bowl, and washed his face and hands ; then she

smoothed his hair, as well as she could, and tied on his hat, bidding him come with her.

“‘The good lady at the big house wants to see you, my dear,’ she said. ‘She’ll tell you, maybe, how to get home again. Say “Good-bye” to Jem, and come along.’

“Frank held his hand out to Jem, and was not afraid of him now, for he began to think Jem was not a giant, but a man like his own papa, only not quite so clean. The old woman put on her red cloak and black bonnet, and led the way out of the cottage. Frank was soon trotting beside her along a green road through the wood. After a time, they passed a cottage, larger than the old woman’s, and saw a little girl at the door, the very same little girl who had given Frank a piece of bread the day before. She nodded and smiled when she saw him, and the old woman patted her head and called her a good child. By-and-by, they came to a farmhouse, which Frank knew to be the very same to which the bird had led him. The old woman was going to the door, when Frank said, ‘Please don’t go there! The enchanted Bird took me there yesterday, and the woman was angry, and said she would send the dog after me. Please come away!’

“‘Bless the child!’ said the old woman, ‘he’s at his nonsense again. ‘Never fear, my dear,’ she added kindly, ‘I’m going to ask after Farmer Benson. Nobody shall hurt you, I promise you that.’

“Frank trembled very much, however, and as they came to the door, he pulled the old woman’s gown, and whis-

pered, 'Look, there's the enchanted bird!' and sure enough, the large black bird came hopping from the farm-yard towards them. The old woman began to laugh heartily.

" 'Why, that's old Ralph, Farmer Benson's raven, my dear. The boys have taught him to talk just a few words, such as "Come along," and "What's o'clock?" and the poor bird wouldn't harm anybody. Farmer Benson found him in the wood when he was hardly fledged, and could scarcely fly; so they're all very fond of him, and he knows all the children as if he was one of them. He'd never harm you, my dear.' "

" Frank was a little bit ashamed of his fear, and said no more. Presently the woman he had seen the day before milking a cow, came out of the house. She smiled when she saw the old woman, and said, 'My husband seems better to-day. Yesterday he was very bad, and I was sorely frightened; but he's had a good sleep, and seems quite another man.'

" The old woman said she was glad, and then added, 'I'm going to the big house with this child. He's lost himself in the wood, and he don't seem over sensible; but perhaps the good lady may think of a way of finding his friends.'

" "I do think,' cried the other woman, 'it's the little boy I was so cross to yesterday. Poor little man! I felt sorry, afterwards, that I'd been so hard with him; but I was so worried about my husband, I scarce knew what I was

doing. Shake hands, and forgive, poor little boy; and I hope you'll soon find your friends. It's sad to lose your senses and your friends too.'

"Frank shook hands very readily, and then the old woman set off with him again. They passed the hill with the fairy rings upon it, and Frank pointed them out, and asked if the old woman had ever seen the fairies dance there?

"'Fairies?'" she said, laughing. 'No, my dear, I never heard of anybody seeing fairies, except in their dreams. I've heard say it's some plant that makes the grass grow darker in those rings, and curious enough that is, without looking to fairies for it.'

"Frank thought of the queen he had certainly met, but he did not like to contradict. At last, they reached an open space, and he beheld the castle in which he supposed Bluebeard lived, and to his surprise the old woman led him to the gate, and pulled a bell, which rang out loud and clear. Frank thought Bluebeard himself would most likely come to see who dared ring so loud, and while he waited in great dread, he was startled by a panting noise behind him. He looked round, and saw the great hairy black creature that had awakened him the day before. It was close behind him now, with a great red tongue hanging out on one side of its mouth, and a row of white teeth shining on the other.

"'The wolf! the wolf!' screamed Frank, seizing the old woman's hand. 'He'll eat me! Come away, do come away!'

"But the old woman only laughed again, and began patting the monster.

"'Why, my dear,' she said, 'how timorsome you are, to be sure! It's only farmer Benson's good old sheep-dog. Poor old Towler!—good fellow!'

"By this time the gate was opened, not by Bluebeard, but by an old grey-headed footman, who looked pleased to see the old woman, and said, 'You're early abroad to-day, Goody Cole, but my mistress has done breakfast. Who have you here?'

"'I want to see the good lady about this poor crazy little boy,' said the old woman. 'I want to find his friends, for he's lost them, and his wits too.'

"'Poor little thing! I'll tell the lady you're here,' continued the man.

"A few minutes afterwards, Frank and the old woman were shown into a cheerful, pretty room, where sat an old lady alone. She was dressed in black, and had a white cap over her soft grey hair. Her pale smooth face looked so sweet and kind, that no one could help feeling inclined to love her at first sight. She held Frank's hand while the old woman told her story, and then she smiled and said,

"'Leave him with me while you rest in the house-keeper's room, Dame Cole. Perhaps I may be able to find out who he is. I am glad you have been so kind to the poor child.'

"When the old woman had left the room, the lady took Frank on her knee, and led him on, by asking questions, to

tell her about his adventures, and about his home ; and she soon guessed he was the motherless child who lived in the house just beyond the wood. She sent a messenger at once to tell the nurse the little boy was safe, and to bid her come to the castle. Then she talked very kindly to Frank about all the things that had puzzled him, and showed him how little reason there had been for his fears. She soon found out that he was not crazy or stupid, but only very ignorant, and she felt very sorry for him. She made him understand that such stories as 'Bluebeard,' and 'Red Riding Hood, and 'Jack and the Beanstalk,' were only made up from somebody's fancy, just to amuse children, and were no more true than dreams are ; but when she went on to say there were no such creatures as fairies, Frank answered sturdily, 'Indeed there are, ma'am, I've seen one.'

"The lady asked him to tell her what it was like, and he was just going to begin, when the door of the room burst open, and on the threshold stood the Fairy Queen herself, in the same dress of glistening green, with the same white feathers in her cap, the same golden hair hanging over her shoulders, and the same silver whistle in her tiny hands ! Even the little white dog was beside her. There she stood for a moment ; then, running forward, she threw her arms round the old lady's neck, and cried—'Oh, my darling auntie, I've had such a lovely ride ! Don't scold me for being late !'

"At this moment she caught sight of Frank's face, and burst into a merry laugh, for his eyes and mouth were

wide open with wonder, making him look very droll indeed.

“‘What is the matter, little boy? and where do you come from? I do think you are the little boy I met in the wood yesterday. And how came you to be sitting on auntie’s knee?’

“Frank did not even hear what she said, but he asked her in return—‘Are you the Fairy Queen? Did you come by the Golden Road from the Purple Mountains?’

“‘No,’ answered the little girl, laughing again, ‘I’m Ellie Carr, and I ride about the wood on a white pony that my dear auntie gave me.’

“The old lady bade her go and change her dress, and then come back to play with Frank; and when she returned in her white frock, with nothing on her head but a little net in which her hair was rolled up, he was quite able to believe she was not the Fairy Queen, but only a merry, good-humoured little girl. She took him to her play-room, and they were soon talking like old friends, among her toys.

“When nurse arrived, she had a great deal to say about her joy at seeing Frank again, and all the sorrow and fear she had gone through when she missed him, and had looked for him in vain. After she had hugged and kissed him as much as he was inclined to think enough, the lady called her into another room, and talked to her for some time; after which, the lady returned to Frank, and said to him—‘My dear little boy, I know your papa, and I loved your mamma very much. I have told Nurse to go and fetch

your clothes, for I should like you to live with me till your papa comes home again. Nurse will stay here too, and you can play with Ellie every day—only I shall expect you to obey me, and attend to all I say to you. Will you do so?’

“‘Indeed I will,’ said poor little Frank; ‘Stay here always with Ellie and you? Oh how good you are!’

“So it was all settled, and that day was the happiest day Frank had ever known. Already he could laugh at the fancies that had made him so fearful only the day before, and he longed to see Jem again to thank him for his kindness. He sent a kind message by Dame Cole, when he wished her good-bye, and the old woman promised not to forget it.

“In the evening Frank, tired with play, was sitting on the carpet at the good lady’s feet, while Ellie sat on her knee. He looked very thoughtful, and the lady asked him what he was thinking about.

“‘I was thinking,’ he said, ‘that I know now about all the things I saw yesterday, except the Golden Road and the Purple Mountains. I saw them, indeed I did. I wish I could go there!’

“‘Ah, little Frank,’ answered the old lady, laying her hand gently on his head, ‘I shall go there before you. I am old and stiff now, but when I tread the Golden Road, and go up the Purple Mountains, I shall need no staff.’

“The little boy looked puzzled, but Ellie put her arm round the old lady’s neck and kissed her, whispering, ‘Not yet, auntie, not for a long while yet.’

"The old lady smiled and shook her head; then she said to Frank, 'You are wondering what I mean, dear child. The hills and the road you saw yesterday were only sunset clouds that soon melted away again. They were only a picture of the Purple Mountains and the Golden Road that Ellie and I are thinking of. The real ones are more beautiful still, but we shall not see them till we leave this world for ever. I am old, and therefore I said I should soon be there.'

" 'Is my mamma there?' asked Frank, in a low voice, for his nurse had said little to him of that other real world of which the good lady spoke. 'Do take me with you if she is there.'

"The good lady began at once to teach the little boy about holy things; and day after day from that time she tried to guide him, so that at last he might reach the Beautiful Land to which she was soon expecting to be called away. He loved the stories she told him, and tried to please her in every way he could. When his father returned, it was settled that Frank should remain with the good lady for the present; and there we will leave him, as happy as any little boy in the whole wide world."



CHAPTER VII.

A WALK ON THE COMMON.

BESSIE'S story helped Charlie and Tomtit to get through the morning pretty well. At dinner-time Gerty came down, and announced that her mother was gone to bed with a bad headache, and would prefer to be left alone all the afternoon; but that she wished the children to take a walk, and they might call for the Charltons if they liked, and pay Mrs. Charlton a visit afterwards. This they were very ready to do, and they did not linger over what seemed to them a very melancholy meal. The day had become bright and sunny, and they all cheered up a little when they met the Charltons coming in search of them. Charlie proposed that they should go to the wood on the edge of Sir Charles Danvers' park, and thither they went accordingly, walking much more soberly than usual and all keeping together.

As they came near the trees they heard voices, and soon discovered a group of little children seated on the ground at play. Gerty recognised a little girl belonging to her class at the school, and went near to speak to her. It was a little creature, not more than eight years old, but she

was the eldest of the six assembled there, and a fat boy of about a year old was seated in her lap. When she saw Gerty she put down the boy, stood up and made a curtsy, smiling shyly, but evidently with pleasure and affection.

"How d'ye do, Martha," said Gerty. "What a little party you've got here! I'm glad to see you are well, for I was afraid there might be something the matter when I missed you from your place in the class last Sunday. You don't often play truant."

"Please, miss," answered Martha, with another curtsy, "I was very sorry, but mother wanted me to mind Tommy, so I couldn't come."

"Is this Tommy?" inquired Gerty, pointing to the little boy, who, not approving his removal from Martha's lap, was standing sucking his fist and staring dolefully.

"Yes, miss," replied Martha, proudly; "that's Tommy; and this," she continued, pointing to another older boy, "this one is Billy, and this little girl is Fanny. Where's your manners, Billy? Stand up and bow to the lady."

Billy did as he was told, rather sheepishly.

"And who are these other children?" asked Gerty.

"This is Lucy Mills, miss, a neighbour, and the other little boy is her brother Johnny. She helps me mind the children, and Mrs. Mills is looking after mother."

"Helps you to mind the children," replied Fred Charlton, laughing. "Why, what do you call yourself? Arn't you a child, you old-fashioned little creature?"

"Please, sir, I'm the eldest," said Martha, rather hurt. "I'm obliged to mind the little ones."

"I hope they mind you," said Fred.

"Oh yes, sir, thank you ; they're very good ;" and she looked at them with all an elder sister's pride.

"I hope you will be able to come to school to-morrow, Martha," remarked Gerty.

"Please, miss, we've got a new baby at home," answered the little girl, "and I'm afraid I shall be wanted all day. The children wouldn't be quiet, so Lucy and I brought them here, and so we must again to-morrow. We saw Master Harry go by, miss."

"What ! were you here so early ?" inquired Charlie.

"Oh yes, sir," answered Martha ; "we came just after breakfast, and we've been here all day."

"And what did you do for dinner?" continued Charlie.

"We brought a bit of bread apiece, and a few cold potatoes, please sir," replied the child. "I can't mind the children and the cooking too, so we take just what we can get."

"I should not think you could, indeed, you little old woman," said Fred. "One might go so far as to believe you could not reach to lift a pot on to the fire. But I say, Gerty, just come here a minute."

There was a few minutes' whispered conversation between Fred and Gerty, and then, calling Charlie to go with him, Fred set off at a quick pace towards home, while Gerty returned to little Martha and asked her some further questions. By degrees she gathered that Martha's parents lived in one of two miserable cottages standing close *together off the high road, half a mile from the edge of*

the common, and that Lucy Mills' parents occupied the other cottage. Gerty had passed them at a little distance, and thought them very tumble-down places indeed. John Croft, Martha's father, was a shepherd, and generally worked for Farmer Brook, close to Coleham; but the poor man had caught cold at the beginning of the winter, and had been out of work for many weeks—laid up with rheumatism.

"We've had a hard winter, miss," said little Martha; "and the poor place where we live lets in the wet; but the fine weather's a-coming on, and father's been in work again these three weeks, so I hope we shall do better now. Mother's been very unhappy because she couldn't go on giving her twopence a-week to the clothing club; but indeed, miss, she wanted it to buy bread. She hopes, come haymaking time, to earn a little to tidy us up a bit."

Gerty saw that the poor children's clothes were sadly old and worn, though mended with many a darn and patch. They seemed scarcely covering enough to keep them warm, even on that mild April day, and it grieved her to think how much the little creatures must have suffered from cold in the winter. Lucy Mills and her little brother were better clad. Their father was an under-gardener at Sir Charles Danvers', and had had work all the winter.

"Have you any clothes for the new baby?" asked Bessie, recollecting a little frock she had begun weeks ago, and left unfinished, for she was not fond of her needle.

"We've a few poor old things, miss; but we're saving up for a tidy frock for the christening," said Martha, with a smile; "and we've got a hood that a lady gave mother when I was a baby, and an old white shawl that mother was married in, so baby will be quite nice when we take her to church."

At this moment Fred and Charlie returned, each carrying a basket.

"Come, little ones!" cried Fred, in his cheery voice; "sit down in a ring again, and see what we've got in these baskets! Come, Martha, you must sit down with them. That's all right!"

The little creatures, who had been picking daisies and rolling on the grass while Martha talked to Gerty, were soon settled in a group again, and Fred and Charlie, kneeling on the ground near them, opened the baskets and produced a paper of thick sandwiches, of which even Tommy partook with much satisfaction, though more slowly than the rest. Then came a bottle of milk, and some horn drinking-cups, which the Elvingtons, were accustomed to use in their summer pic-nics. All these things were in Fred's basket. Charlie now opened his, and brought to light some thick slices of plum-cake, which made Tommy's round eyes glisten with delight.

"I did not like to disturb mamma," said Charlie, turning to Gerty, "but cook said she was sure I might have the cake, because it was meant for our own tea, and I knew we should all like much better to give it to these little things."

"And I'll tell you what," added Fred; "when I went to my mother to ask about the sandwiches, she told me to tell you grandpapa was going out to dinner, and if you liked to come to drink tea with her, as Mrs. Elvington wants to be quiet, she would be delighted to see you all."

"How kind she is!" said Gerty. "I don't think I can go, in case mamma should want anything; but I am sure the others will like it."

When the cake had disappeared, and all the little children, by Martha's desire, had risen up and made a bow (or an "obedience," as she called it) to each and all of the Elvingtons and Charltons, it was time to think of returning home, as Gerty did not like to be too long absent from her mother. Gerty had a great deal of Harry's steadiness and quiet thoughtfulness; and she felt her responsibility now, more than ever, as eldest of the family. So she called Fred and Charlie to take up their baskets and come away. Before she went, she said to Martha, "You said you should be here to-morrow, Martha. If it is fine we will come and see you at two o'clock, and I will read to you, and hear you say your little catechism, while my sister, I am sure, will look after the other children for you."

Martha curtsied, and thanked Gerty with a very bright smile, and they parted; both parties all the happier for their meeting.



CHAPTER VIII.

A VOYAGE ON STRANGE WATERS.

CHARLIE was so much refreshed by the events of the afternoon, that he found spirit to play at horses with Fred and Tomtit on the way home, while the four little girls were eagerly discussing plans for making garments for the poor children they had seen. Bessie, especially, had set her heart on finishing the frock, begun so long ago, for the christening. It would be the very thing, she said ; a white ground, with the tiniest pale blue leaf, that you could hardly see, all over it. Then the money they had been going to spend on the shells for the rock-work, and half-a-crown apiece which papa had since given them, was to be spent in buying materials ; and the Charltons were ready to join them, both with their purses and their needles ; so it was hoped that in the course of the following week, a great deal might be done. When they reached the Elvingtons' gate, Gerty went in, while the rest agreed to walk up and down outside, till she should be able to tell them how Mrs. Elvington was. She found that her mother had refused food when the servants offered it, though she had said her head was

better. Gerty thought it was quite time, however, that her mother should take something, so she made a nice cup of tea and a delicately thin slice of toast, and carried them up on a tray to the bedside. Mrs. Elvington smiled and said :

"I cannot resist that, my little Gerty ;" and she sat up, drank the tea and ate the toast, and declared herself very much the better for her little daughter's kind attention. She asked what they had all been doing, and was pleased to hear of their adventures and their kind intentions, promising to help if they would really work themselves. Then she asked if they were going to Mrs. Charlton's, and Gerty told her of the kind invitation they had received, but added that she would remain at home herself, in case she should be wanted. But Mrs. Elvington objected to this. "I am so comfortable now, I shall have a long sleep ; and I would much rather you should go with the others, my dear Gerty. I will send for you if I want anything. You know it is close by."

Gerty required a little more persuasion, and then she consented to go, after exchanging a fond kiss with her mother. The rest of the children were very glad when she rejoined them, and in a few minutes they were all gathered round Mrs. Charlton in the pretty room that Bessie loved so dearly. Tea was on the table, and proved very welcome, seasoned with much cheerful talk. Then the young ones clustered round the wood fire as before, all for a time feeling painfully that Harry's place was vacant. Bessie wondered in her heart how it was that

they had been so cheerful just before, and there were tears in her eyes as she took her usual place, and clung lovingly to Mrs. Charlton's hand.

"We are all thinking of the same thing," said Mrs. Charlton. "Partings are always sad, but I hope, my dears, that yours is for a very little time. I remember my brother's first going to school was a bitter sorrow to me; and when he went into the army and was ordered abroad, I was quite broken-hearted."

"Were you living in the same grey house then?" asked Gerty; "the same old house with the secret rooms?"

"Yes, my child, I lived there till I was married. I do not recollect ever going away."

"Do tell us some more stories about it," said Charlie.

Mrs. Charlton smiled and answered, "I do not think there was anything very remarkable about us to make a story, my dear Charlie. We were more left to ourselves than most children, and sometimes we got into trouble in consequence. Perhaps you may like to hear of one of our adventures that happened just before Edward was sent to school; indeed I think it determined grand-mamma to send him without loss of time."

The chairs were drawn in yet a little closer, and a murmur of satisfaction passed round the circle.

"I think I told you," continued Mrs. Charlton, "that my old home was very near the sea. There was a narrow strip of dried-up grass between the house and the cliff's edge, and at high water the waves came up to the foot of the cliff; while, when the tide was out, there was a

broad expanse of sand and shingle, where we dearly liked to play. We could get down to it by some steps that were cut in a zig-zag line on the face of the cliff, a rude descent enough for older people, but easy for young active feet like ours. We used to carry our wooden spades with us, and build up sand castles, or dig wells, and then watch the waves coming up nearer and nearer to our handiwork, overwhelming it at last, and leaving the sand smooth as if we had never touched it. Sometimes we collected long ribbons of seaweed, and wove them into wreaths to hang round our hats, or we caught shoals of little crabs, and put them all together in a pool dug for the purpose. When the tide was quite out, we used to creep far out from the shore, hopping from rock to rock, slippery with slimy weeds. We liked to pull the tufts, like locks of long green hair hanging from the rocks. Small shells were among them, and shining pebbles, and we pretended these were precious jewels from the bottom of the sea. If we found here and there a purple sea-anemone opening its delicate threads, we were amply rewarded for our perilous trip. Many a fall on the wet sand, many a blow as we stumbled over the slippery rocks, and many a wetting as the merry waves came back, and caught us at our play ; but it was all alike to us. We loved the fresh breeze and the rush of the tide better than any inland sound.

“Across the water we caught glimpses of the blue Welsh hills, and about these we had many fancies. In our games we gave them different names. Sometimes we pretended they were in France, sometimes in Africa, ~~often~~

we supposed them to be in the native country of Robinson Crusoe's man Friday, and we talked as if they were peopled with savages. When we saw what we thought to be a light on the shore at dusk, we said the savages were dancing round their fire, or having one of their feasts. We said this so often, that we began at last to believe it, and to have a great curiosity to see them closely.

"We had the shore pretty much to ourselves in general, for there were no houses very near, and most of the fishing-boats landed about half a mile lower down the channel. Now and then it happened that a boat was drawn up on the beach where we were accustomed to play, and then we amused ourselves with jumping in and out of it, and pretending we made voyages. There was one place where the rocks formed a sort of natural quay, stretching out, one beyond the other, quite into deep water. There were many gaps between the rocks, to be sure, but they could be crossed, for we had more than once leapt them all.

"One day, to our surprise, we saw a little boat fastened to the very outermost point of the farthest rock. It was before the turn of the tide, and all the line of our quay, as we called it, was well above water.

"'Look!' said Edward, 'there is a nice little boat, and we can reach it quite easily. Let us go and sit in it till the tide turns, Maggie. Come along.'

"We began our journey along the slippery rocks, now falling into the hollows between them, and clutching at the seaweed to pull ourselves up again, then jumping across a wide gap, and coming so far short of the other side, that

our feet and ankles were actually in the water. Once I tumbled into so deep a hole, that Edward was obliged to throw himself flat on the rock above it, and stretch both his hands down to me to help me out of it; but drenched as I was, I would not turn back, but scrambled on to the very end, almost as soon as Edward himself, and dropped into the boat after him. He was delighted; he shouted and stamped about the boat till it rocked so violently that I was frightened, and implored him to sit down, which he did for a little while.

“‘Did you ever see such a duck of a boat, Maggie,’ he said to me. ‘It seems just made for you and me. Such a little cockle-shell, and painted such a pretty colour! Look at the oars! They’re so small, I’m sure I could manage them myself. What do you say, Maggie? shall we go over there, and see the savages dancing? Why, what’s the matter?’

“‘I was wet, and cold, and rather frightened, but I tried to smile and answer cheerfully, that I was ready to do anything he liked. Certainly, I scarcely knew what I said.

“‘What have we here?’ said Edward, as he dragged from the bottom of the boat a thick cloak, which belonged, I suppose, to the owner. ‘Here, Maggie, put this round you, and you’ll soon be warm.’

“‘He tied it round my neck, and then seated me at the helm, putting some strings into my hands, and telling me I was to steer with them. I had always been used to do whatever Edward desired, so I sat still now, with a string

in each hand, wondering what he was going to do next. He took a gardening-knife out of his pocket, and began to saw the rope that tied the boat to the rock, for his small fingers had tried in vain to loosen the knot. By-and-by he succeeded in cutting it through, and the boat fell off farther from our quay. Down he sat, seized an oar in each hand, and began paddling diligently, calling to me to pull, now the right, now the left string.

“‘Isn’t this grand, Maggie?’ he cried, in the utmost delight. ‘Here we are off for the land of the savages! You’re Friday, and I’m Robinson Crusoe, and won’t we astonish them when we get there? Pull with the right hand, Maggie! that’s it!’

“He had learnt to row a little from an old fisherman, whose boat was one of the few that sometimes came to that part of the beach; so at first we made some way. Soon, however, his arms began to tire, and as we got farther from shore it was evident that we were at the mercy of the tide, which had now turned, and was setting up channel, and carrying us with it. The old grey house, the familiar cliffs, seemed drifting away behind us; and away to the west the sun was sinking lower and lower, sending a long path of light quivering over the water. Gradually a mist began to rise, making distant objects indistinct. It grew thicker as evening came on, and at last closed round us like a veil, and we could see nothing but a few feet of water on each side of the boat. Happily there was no wind, and the sea was quite smooth. Edward took in the oars, and laid them in the boat.

“‘It is of no use to go on rowing,’ he remarked, ‘when one can’t tell where one is going. Are you cold, Maggie?’

“I was indeed, in spite of my cloak, and my teeth chattered so that I could scarcely answer. So Edward came nearer, and made me sit with him at the bottom of the boat, and we floated on in silence for some time. Suddenly we heard voices that seemed quite close to us, and there loomed through the fog something large and black. Edward startled me by putting his hand to his mouth, and uttering a wild unearthly scream, just as we were floating past this black object. His cry attracted notice, for a voice replied immediately, and a rope was thrown so that it fell into our boat, and was caught by Edward. I did not see what happened next, but presently we were both in a pretty cabin, where a lady and gentleman were sitting at dinner, and to them we were required to give an account of ourselves. It appeared that the boat we had taken belonged to the vessel in which we now were, which vessel was a pleasure-yacht. One of the men had landed to visit his family, and knowing the shore well, had left his boat where we found it. A messenger was instantly sent to tell grandmamma what had become of us, and meantime the lady undressed me, and put me into a warm bed, where I soon forgot my troubles in sleep. Edward found himself quite a hero on board, and was in danger of thinking too highly of his exploit. The view grandmamma took of it the next morning, when the kind owners of the yacht conveyed us home, somewhat sobered

Edward's pride; and so ended the first and last voyage I ever made in my brother's company."

"Was your grandmamma very angry?" asked Tomtit, who had listened with much attention.

"She was very justly displeased," said Mrs. Charlton, "as I think you will allow. I thought there was something quite awful in her appearance as she stood on the top of the flight of steps at the great hall-door, looking very tall and stately, thanking the lady and gentleman who took us home. Our punishment was to be separated for a whole week, and certainly we were very miserable indeed."



CHAPTER IX.

SUNDAY.

ON Sunday-morning, Mrs. Elvington came down to breakfast, declaring herself quite well. She had a few hurried lines by the post from her husband, announcing his safe arrival at Plymouth, and telling her that he and Harry were to embark at once, and sail at daylight on Sunday. By this time they were miles away at sea.

Charlie walked to the school with Gerty, and sat by quietly while she taught her little class, for he did not feel himself competent to take Harry's place, and an older boy was already selected for it. After Church, and the early dinner, Gerty prepared to fulfil her promise to little Martha; while Mrs. Elvington went to sit with Mrs. Charlton till the time of the afternoon service. Mr. Ross always required his three grandchildren to walk with him on Sunday afternoon, so the two families saw but little of each other, generally, on that day. Charlie and Bessie had, however, packed a basket of provisions for the little ones on the common; a good store of sandwiches, and some thick slices of plum-pudding, which, though cold, would doubtless be thought a great delicacy; not forgetting

a bottle of milk and the horn cups. Martha was looking out for them, and the younger ones looked wistfully at the basket ; but, as they had all but lately eaten their portions of bread and cold potatoes, it was thought the basket might remain unopened until Gerty had done with her little pupil. Charlie, Bessie, and Tomtit, took charge of the four youngest children, who were exhorted by Martha to be "as good as gold ;" and Lucy requested to hear the lesson, so she went a little apart with Gerty, who sat down on a mossy bank, and made the little girls stand before her, while Martha repeated a simple catechism she was learning, and some verses of a hymn.

"I can say the collect too, please miss," she said, as Gerty patted her head and called her a good girl ; and she repeated it quite correctly. Then Gerty bade the little pair sit down close to her, and read them the gospel for the day, beginning "I am the Good Shepherd," and tried to explain its meaning in very plain words. Martha's father was a shepherd, and the little girl had seen him go out in storm and snow to look after his flock, and had known how tenderly he cared for the young lambs ; so she listened with great interest to all she heard. Gerty afterwards repeated the twenty-third Psalm, and told the children of David, the sweet singer of Israel ; how he had been a shepherd too, and how sweet it had been to him in the long night-watches to remember that there was One who watched over him as he tried to watch over his flock. She told them of the dangers that threatened flocks *in the land where David lived and where Jesus taught—*

the wild beasts that might come prowling round the fold if the shepherd slept; "but our Shepherd never sleeps," she added.

Lucy Mills looked puzzled, and said—

"Wild beasts never come near us here."

"No," answered Gerty, "but evil things come to us, as the wild beasts came to those sheep. Wicked thoughts and discontented wishes—all kinds of sin and wrong are like those wild beasts. We want our Shepherd to keep all these away from us. We could not be well, or good, or happy unless our Shepherd took care of us. When He makes us happy, it is like the shepherd leading his flock to green pastures by still waters. He is very good to us."

"The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep," repeated little Martha; "our Shepherd did that."

"Yes," Gerty said, her own heart very full of the thoughts she had been trying to express to her little pupil; "He laid down His life for us all. That was greater love than you or I can understand. But we know He is alive again now, caring for us all. We know every good thing we have comes from His love. As long as we live He will care for us, and when we die He will be with us. Will you try and show your love to Him who is so very good to you? Sometimes, Martha, you may be tired—"

"Yes, miss," interrupted the little girl; "when Fanny's cross, and Billy won't do what I tell him, and Tommy will do nothing but cry, and father thinks it's all my fault, and asks why I don't keep the children quieter—then, miss, I do feel tired like, and as if I should like to cry myself."

"It must seem hard for you, Martha," answered Gerty; "but our Good Shepherd loves those who are patient. He is pleased if you bear things well for His sake. A thought of Him, even, will help you."

With a few more words Gerty dismissed her pupil, and then the basket was opened and its contents were handed round. The distant sound of the Coleham clock warned the Elvingtons that they must not delay; so they left the cups and basket in Martha's charge, promising to fetch them on the morrow, and walked briskly homewards. The younger ones talked merrily, but Gerty was silent and thoughtful. The lesson she had been trying to teach had gone home to her own heart. In the morning she had sadly missed Harry; then at dinner her father's cheerful voice was wanting; so she had set forth that afternoon with a heavy and somewhat discontented spirit. Now the colour of her thoughts was changed. Parted she might be from those she loved; some might be far away on the sea, out of her sight and hearing; but there was One who watched over them and her—"one fold under one shepherd." That was the comfort she had needed, and now it had been given to her.

Mrs. Elvington was waiting at the gate, so they went on to the church at once. On their return they were joined by the Charltons, and old Mr. Ross spoke so kindly and feelingly to Mrs. Elvington that Gerty felt less afraid of him than she had ever done before. He said he could feel for those who were parted, for he had himself spent *long years in India*, while his children grew up in England

without knowing him. He was glad it would not be so with Captain Elvington, since his family were soon to follow him ; but he and his poor daughter and the children would sorely miss their good friends at the red house. No new comers could ever be the same to them.

There was a glorious sunset, and all the party walked to a little mound on the common to see the last of it. Heavy masses of dark purple were relieved by a flood of splendour below, lingering for some time after the sun himself had disappeared. Charlie turned to Bessie—"Those are your Purple Mountains and your Golden Road, Bessie."

Bessie smiled, and her mother asked what Charlie meant ; so there followed a conversation on the story of Frank, especially the latter part of it, which, it seemed, Tomtit had hardly understood. When they got home Mrs. Elvington took a book from the bookcase, and said she would read aloud some lines of which Bessie's story had reminded her.

"I know, mamma," exclaimed Bessie ; "I heard you read them once before, and perhaps they put that part about the clouds into my head."

Mrs. Elvington smiled and read the poem, which described a glorious sunset, and then compared it to the beauty of heaven, and called on the old people to come and look at it, in these words :—

"Come forth, ye drooping old men ! look abroad,
And see to what bright countries ye are bound !"—*Wordsworth*



CHAPTER X.

THE MERMAID.

THE next week was a very busy one. Charlie resumed his attendance at the school at Coleham, and his sisters were occupied with their lessons all the morning, and hard at work at other times making clothes for the little Crofts. Gerty's needle flew merrily through her long seams, but with Bessie it was a great effort to work steadily. Sometimes the frock would lie idly on her knee, while she fell into one of her dreamy fits, making up a story, or thinking of one that had been told to her, and it needed a gentle shake to rouse her to her task again. Mrs. Elvington worked with her children for an hour or two every afternoon, and the two Charltons generally joined the party. By Saturday morning there was a heap of comfortable, tidy clothing, only needing a few finishing touches; the only thing still in a backward state was Bessie's christening-frock. She had persisted in making it in rather a difficult manner, and now she was almost ready to cry because she could scarcely hope to have it finished by the afternoon, when the other things *were to be given away.*

"Poor Bessie!" whispered Mary Charlton. "I wish we could do anything to help her."

But Mrs. Elvington wished Bessie to finish what she had begun; so there was no hope but in unusual diligence.

"Suppose I tried to think of a story," said Mrs. Elvington, at last. "Do you think it would help your needle to travel quickly, my dear?"

The little face brightened at the idea; and after a few minutes' thought, Mrs. Elvington began.

"I am going to tell you a wonderful, true story; but you must not stop to look at me, or the chances are that I shall stop speaking.

"A family of children named Maynard, consisting of three boys and two girls, had had the whooping-cough very severely in London, and it was thought desirable that they should be taken to the sea-side to recover their health. So a house was hired near Freshwater, at the back of the Isle of Wight, and Mrs. Maynard, with nurses and children, took up her abode in it without loss of time. They all got better very quickly except the youngest little boy, who had always been delicate. He was eight years old, and his name was Algernon, but he was generally called Algy. As his brothers and sisters recovered, Mrs. Maynard took them many pleasant excursions into the neighbourhood, but Algy, not being strong, was unable to join them. The house he lived in was very near the sea; so, when his mother and the rest were absent, his nurse used to sit at a window, and watch him while he played on the beach. It was rather lonely for him at first, but he soon learnt to

play by himself, and collect shells, and amuse himself, as all children do by the sea-shore.

“One day he had collected all the different kinds of seaweed he could find, and had strewn them on the sand to make a sort of carpet to a tower or room which he had built with stones. While he was busy, a young lady whom he had never seen before, came walking along the shore, and sat down very near him, with an open book on her knee. Presently she ceased to look at the book, but sat watching the lonely little boy, with a kind smile that prevented his being afraid of her. By-and-by, she spoke :

“‘How do you do, little boy?’” she said. ‘Are you fond of seaweeds?’

“‘Yes,’ he said ; ‘I like to play with them when I’m by myself.’

“Then she asked why he was alone, and he told her all about his illness, and how it had lasted longer than that of his brothers and sisters.

“‘Poor little fellow !’ she said, kindly. ‘What is your name?’

“He told her it was Algy, and she laughed and said, pointing to the seaweed,

“‘Why, you are very properly employed, Algy, for these plants that grow at the bottom of the sea are called *algæ*.’

“‘How can they grow in the sea?’ he asked. ‘I thought the sea brought them away from some other land.’

“Then the lady told him there were hills and valleys *under the sea*, as there are on dry land. She talked to

him of coral reefs in calm shallow seas, built up inch by inch till they reached the surface and caught the wood and weeds as they floated by ; so, gradually, producing soil in which passing birds dropped seeds, till plants and trees covered the whole, and it became an island fair enough to tempt men to settle in it. She spoke of shells, some spiral-shaped, with pearly linings to their many chambers ; some with soft golden tufts like human hair hanging from them ; - some containing little creatures that spread their arms abroad and sailed over the sea. She talked of myriads of creatures peopling the waters, from the great whale to the exquisitely-shaped insect that could only be seen with the microscope. Algy listened with amazement.

“ ‘ If you like to come home with me for a little while,’ continued the young lady, ‘ I will show you a few of your namesakes, the algæ, which I have collected and arranged, and also some corals and shells. I know your mamma, and I do not think she would object to your coming. Go and tell nurse that Miss Lisle wishes to take you home and give you your dinner, after which she will try to amuse you for an hour, and then bring you back to the beach.’

“ Algy soon obtained his nurse’s permission, and set off, holding his new friend’s hand. Soon they reached a gate with a pretty lodge beside it, and after crossing a small paddock, they arrived at a large pleasant-looking house. Miss Lisle took the little boy straight to the dining-room, where they found an old lady and gentleman, whom she called her father and mother, and who shook hands with

Algy and welcomed him very kindly. Luncheon was on the table, and they all sat down to it at once. After it was over, Miss Lisle bade Algy follow her, and went into another room, which she told him was her own study. The large window looked out over the sea, and the afternoon sun was shining in on the brightly-coloured carpet, and lighting up some pretty drawings that hung on the wall. There were bookcases full of books, and tables covered with work and painting materials ; but what struck Algy most was a cabinet stretching all along the wall opposite to the window, filled, he was sure, with the curiosities he had come to see. The doors of the cabinet were of glass, to show the wonders within, but it had one striking peculiarity. Instead of legs, it was supported by three carved figures with heads like those of women, and long hair forming a cloak ; but below the waist they had large scaly tails like fish, bent in a graceful curve to support the weight above.

“ ‘You are admiring my mermaids,’ said Miss Lisle, smiling ; ‘I had them made because I thought they would just suit the contents of my cabinet, where I only place wonderful things out of the sea.’ ”

“ Now Algy had never heard of mermaids, but he did not like to ask any questions about them ; and Miss Lisle opened the glass doors, and began talking to him of her treasures, in which he was soon deeply interested. There were large lilac ‘sea-fans,’ from Bermuda ; seaweeds, purple, green, rose-coloured, brown, and crimson, from all parts of the world—some spread on sheets of paper, to show the

delicate threads, which seemed as if a breath would destroy them ; there were trees of coral, white, and pink, and dark red ; in short, when Miss Lisle closed the cabinet and said Algy must be tired now, and that he should come another day to see the rest, the child felt quite bewildered and giddy at the thought of all the wonderful things he had heard of for the first time on that day. Miss Lisle returned with him to the beach, and saw that nurse was seated with her work at a window, whence she nodded to Algy to let him know she would watch over him ; and then the little boy was left by his new friend, with promises of an early meeting. He did feel very tired, so he found himself a comfortable seat on the sand, where he could lean back against a rock and rest himself. As he sat there, his eyes wandered over the water, and his head was busy with many thoughts. Hitherto he had not known of anything living and growing in the sea, except the fish, which he saw the fishing-boats bring home at night. Now he knew the ocean was teeming with life. Even little delicate insects could find a safe home there, and fragile plants. Then came across him the recollection of the mermaids. Were there really creatures like those, able to live in the sea, as comfortably as he lived on the land ?

“ He was still engaged in these reflections, when suddenly the water just opposite to him began to froth and foam, and the next moment a merry, rosy face rose out of the little waves, and nodded to him. The face was so pleasant that Algy immediately nodded in return, and then it rose higher out of the water, and moved nearer to

the place where he was sitting. And now the little boy saw that there was something very strange about this new-comer. The face was like that of a little girl whom he had known in London ; but instead of the blue eyes and yellow hair he remembered, he now saw greenish eyes, and hair of the colour of the freshest grass. Presently, as the stranger came nearer and nearer, he heard a curious *flopping* sound on the sand, and perceived, to his amazement, that his visitor had a scaly tail, gleaming green and gold in the sunshine."

"O mamma!" interrupted Bessie, as her work fell from her hands—"you said it should be a true story!"

"I said I should stop telling my wonderful true story," replied Mrs. Elvington, "if a certain little girl stopped working."

Bessie blushed, and resumed her needle, while her mother continued:—

"Of course, as soon as Algy saw the tail, he knew his visitor was a mermaid, and looked at her with fresh interest. The mermaid came quite close, and held out her hand, saying in a sweet voice, 'I hear your name is Algæ, so you belong to the sea. Give me your hand.'

"He did so, and found the mermaid's hand as cold as marble and rather damp ; but he said, pleasantly, he hoped she was quite well. While he waited for her to speak again, he heard the water falling drip, drip, drip, from her long hair on to the sand.

"'I am quite well, thank you,' she answered, 'but I have come a long way to look for you. Somebody told me

you wanted to see the beautiful things that are under the sea, so I have come to fetch you.'

"'But I don't know how to swim,' argued Algy.

"The mermaid produced a little bundle from under her arm, and unrolled something, saying, 'I have brought a spare tail with me; you have only to step into this, and I will tie it round your waist, and you will be able to swim anywhere.'

"Algy did as she desired him, and presently he lost sight of his legs, and saw a green and gold tail in their place.

"'Give me your hand,' said the mermaid; 'it is not easy to flop along on the shore, but when once you get to the water, we shall do very well.'

"So, with her assistance, he made his way to the brink, and there he hesitated a moment; but she cried, 'Come along! you will like it very much.' And in another minute, still holding her hand, he was floating on the water, which felt quite warm and pleasant. He looked back once, and saw nurse kiss her hand to him, as if she was quite satisfied he should go, so he had no anxieties of any sort. As they reached deeper water, his guide said,

"'Now we must not float any more;' and downward she dived, taking him with her. The waves closed over his tail, and head foremost he went through the warm sunny water. There were strange many-coloured fish flashing past him, and creatures whose names he did not know; but he had hardly time to notice anything, till his guide stopped and said, 'Now you will see my home.'

"Then he began to look about him. Above was the

clear green water, and before him lay a garden full of seaweeds, brighter than any flowers he had ever seen growing on the earth. A gate made of white coral opened into this garden, and a smooth sandy path led to the door of a palace of great beauty. Its walls were encrusted with shells, and the low marble steps that led into its hall were bordered with sea-fans as large as oak-trees. It was not easy to get along the sandy path or up the marble-steps, but the little mermaid was very good-natured and ready to help ; so by-and-by Algy found himself in the great hall, and looked about him with fresh delight. The walls were of something shining and transparent, and through the dome at the top, the light came in, broken into rays of rainbow colours ; while, scattered over the floor, were fountains of green water, making an endless sound of singing. There was no want of nosegays either, for bunches of brilliant seaweed were arranged in rustic baskets of red and white coral, just as the geraniums in Miss Lisle's study were arranged in wicker-work flower-stands. There was, however, one thing that puzzled him. Instead of chairs or sofas, there were painted baths arranged in rows along the wall ; so he asked his friend what they were for.

“ ‘ Why, you see,’ she answered, ‘ we are very fond of the water, so when we all meet here, we each get into one of those baths. Try one ; they are very convenient, I assure you.’

“ He did try one, and found it delightful. And now he heard a sound of voices approaching, and a troop came bursting into the hall, full of merriment, all very like his

guide, who greeted them as sisters, and proposed a game, not within doors, but out in the free water. Away they rushed, Algy still keeping quite close to his friend; and they all began playing at hide-and-seek among the rocks, and swimming races up to the surface of the water. Algy became quite accustomed to his new circumstances, and swam as well as anybody. But even mermaids get tired at last, and his friend turned to him and said, 'Would you like a ride in my carriage?'

"‘Certainly,’ he answered. ‘I am ready for anything.’

"Up they swam again to the surface, and there they found a sort of car like a large shell of pearl, drawn by about a hundred little nautili, with their sails spread, and their white shells gleaming in the light. The car was oval and hollowed, so as to receive the two travellers, who took their places in it; and at a word from the little mermaid, the nautili moved on. In a moment, hundreds of merry faces, all crowned with green hair, rose from the waves on all sides, and voices began shouting so loud—in short, Bessie, so loud, that Algy awoke, and beheld his own human brothers and sisters all round him, calling him to come in and have his tea."

"So it was only a dream," said Bessie.

"Only a dream," said her mother; "but it has helped you to finish your task, and this afternoon we will take the clothes to the Crofts."



CHAPTER XI.

A TRAVELLER'S TALES.

TIME passed on. The early spring had brought such an abundance of flowers, that the May-day garlands were more beautiful than any that had been seen for years. Then came a bright Sunday, on which the baby Crofts was carried to church (arrayed in the memorable christening-frock), and baptized in the midst of the afternoon service. John Crofts considered the name of Gertrude too fine, he said, for a daughter of his, so the child was called Elizabeth in compliment to the Elvington family in general. Bessie blushed to the tips of her fingers when the name was given out in the face of the congregation; but she need not have minded it, for there were plenty of Elizabeths present besides herself, and very few people knew anything at all about her acquaintance with the Crofts.

Cheerful letters came often from Captain Elvington and Harry. They had found the *Phæbus* in Malta Harbour, and were soon to sail in her for the Isles of Greece. Meantime, they were well and happy, and Harry worked *hard at his studies*.

"We have not seen any of the Charltons since Wednesday," remarked Mrs. Elvington at breakfast one Saturday morning, about the middle of May. "We must go to them to-day. Thursday was so wet, that I suppose they were weather-bound like ourselves, and I don't think any of us, except Charlie, went out yesterday."

"Fred was not at school yesterday," said Charlie, looking up from the Latin grammar, which was open beside his plate. "I promised to call this morning, and ask why he did not make his appearance."

"Very well," answered Mrs. Elvington. "This being your half-holiday, we will come and meet you this afternoon and have a good walk. We can call at the cottage on our way."

Accordingly, when the two girls had finished their morning's lessons, Mrs. Elvington set forth with them and little Tomtit; but, as they left their own gate, they saw Mary and Annie Charlton approaching, accompanied by a strange gentleman.

"Oh, Mrs. Elvington," cried Mary, "we were just coming to see you, and tell you the news. This is our uncle Edward, mamma's brother. We never thought of his coming, and on Thursday, in the midst of the rain, he arrived at the door, with the sweetest little Aunt Emily that ever was seen, and such a baby!—oh, *such* a baby!"

Mrs. Elvington looked bewildered for a moment at the torrent of words, then turning to the gentleman, with a smile, she held out her hand, saying, "Major Ross, I suppose? I am very glad to see you, and delighted that my

dear friends at the Cottage should have had so agreeable a surprise. We all know you well by name."

Major Ross answered very cordially, and then said that he had latterly been stationed in an unhealthy part of India, where his wife and child had suffered so much, that the doctors had suddenly ordered them home; and, as he had been abroad many years, and was not very well himself, he had asked for leave, and had come with them. The whole business had been settled in about a week, so there was no time to write, and they had had to announce themselves.

"I find my father very little changed," he said, "and my dear Maggie is so pleased to see us, that she fancies she is better. Poor Maggie!"

There was a minute's pause, during which time Tomtit was heard to utter, in a low but distinct voice, "Oh, it must be the mischievous boy!"

Major Ross drew back a little, took off his hat, made a profound bow, and said,—

"Exactly so, sir. May I know your name?"

"I'm Tomtit," replied the child, much abashed, and thankful that his mother called off Major Ross's attention by proposing to call on Mrs. Ross.

"She has gone out in the carriage with my father," he said; "but I promised Maggie to beg you to go and see her, and to remain with her till the others return from their drive. Meanwhile, if you will allow me, I propose to take charge of all the young ones, and go for a walk with *them*."

"I am afraid this one is too young," said Mrs. Elvington, looking at her little boy, "but the others will be charmed."

"Oh dear no, Tomtit is not too young, I assure you," answered Major Ross. "Whenever he is tired he shall ride on my shoulder, like this;" and in a moment Tomtit found himself swung into a seat higher from the ground than he had ever before been in his life, for Major Ross was so tall as to be almost a giant. For a moment the heart of Tomtit quailed, and he longed to be again on his mother earth; but he remembered in good time that he was the son of a sailor, restrained the cry that rose to his lips, and in a few moments grew reconciled to his position. Mrs. Elvington moved towards the cottage, and the rest walked towards Coleham to meet Fred and Charlie, who were soon perceived approaching them. A discussion ensued as to where they should walk, but Major Ross declared Gerty, being the eldest lady present, should settle that question without appeal.

"Suppose we go up Field Lane," she said, "to Bramley Common, as far as Henbury Hill."

Everyone approved the suggestion, and they turned to the left before entering the town of Coleham, and passed along the lane between its leafy hedgerows, skirting fields, green with young corn, and musical with the song of the lark. The lane opened on a common of some extent, diversified here and there with mounds covered with fir-trees; while the largest of these, called Henbury Hill, boasted a spreading oak, planted either by accident or design on its very summit. Under this tree, whose young

leaves were unfolding hour by hour, the whole party sat down, tired and breathless. Major Ross seemed to enjoy the quiet English view, and pointed out the meadows where the wind-swept grass was almost ready for the scythe, and the cottages with blue smoke rising into the clear air.

"But you ought to have been in India to enjoy it all as I do," he said. "This is a charming place, and this *tope* is the very prettiest of all."

"The hounds come here very often in the winter," said Charlie. "Last January, they found in that cover over there, and the fox came across the common, and right over this hill. I suppose you won't care for fox-hunting, Major Ross? Fred says you used to shoot tigers and hunt wild-boars."

"I have done such things," answered Major Ross, "but I dare say I may manage to amuse myself if I can find a horse strong enough to carry me. If not, Mary and I will drive out and look on. Do you ever ride, Mary?"

"No, uncle, except sometimes on Mrs. Elvington's pony, when we go for pic-nics, and ride by turns."

"Ah!" he said, "your poor mother was the rider!—nothing ever daunted her. She sat like a bird; and I don't think I ever saw her the least nervous, except, perhaps, once."

"When was that?" asked Mary—"do tell us, uncle."

"Did she never tell you about our meeting the mad elephant in Ceylon?"

"Never."

"Ah, poor Maggie! It was just before your father's death, and perhaps she could not speak of it. Well, this was the story. I had got leave from my regiment in India, and I went to pass a month in Ceylon with my sister. Charlton was in weak health, though we little thought how ill he really was; the only difference in his habits was, that he felt unequal to ride before breakfast, and was glad to lie on a sofa in the verandah while I escorted my sister. She and I enjoyed our morning excursions, and talked over our childish days, and all the tricks the mischievous boy, Master Tomtit, had played in years gone by. I rode a strong charger of Charlton's, and my sister an old Arab, once a noble creature, and still pleasant to ride, though long past its prime. However, for such quiet rides as we were in the habit of taking, she preferred her old Arab to any other horse.

"One morning we were walking our horses, and engaged in conversation, passing the outskirts of a wood some three miles from home, when suddenly from the shade of the trees burst forth a wild cry, and a mad elephant came out of the wood, breaking the branches in his way, and rushing straight towards us. He was so near there was no time for consultation. My horse, ungovernable with terror, started off to the right. I screamed to Maggie, "Trust to your horse's speed;" but ere I could see what became of her, I was borne far away from the spot. When I recovered the command of my frightened horse, I galloped back in sight of the scene of our adventure, but saw no sign either of the elephant or of my sister. I then rushed home, and, to my

joy, found she had already arrived there. Her noble old Arab, without stop or stumble, and certainly without any guidance from her, had carried her safely to her own door."

"And what became of the elephant?" asked Bessie.

"I am sorry to say I don't know," replied Major Ross, smiling; "my poor sister thought she heard it pounding after her, as she flew homewards. She even fancied she felt its hot breath on her neck; and, so strong was the impression, and so sincere the terror, that for weeks she never slept without dreaming the elephant was following her. Once she was even very much hurt by springing from her bed and falling on the floor, when the dream was more vivid than usual."

"How horrible!" exclaimed Mary. "I wonder mamma never told us about it."

"Your father's increasing illness must be so connected in her memory with this adventure, that I do not wonder she should not have mentioned it, Mary. Did she ever tell you how nearly Annie was devoured by a leopard?"

"No, do tell us," cried Annie, astonished to find she had been the heroine of an adventure.

"You were all in India then," said Major Ross, "and I was with you for a few days, as my regiment and Charlton's were at neighbouring stations. He, however, was not with the regiment, but in tents some three miles off, where the air was supposed to be a little cooler, from the ground rising slightly above the plain. My own sleeping-tent was *pitched close to your father's*, and by day we all lived in a

fine large double-roofed tent, divided into two apartments, which we called our dining and drawing rooms, though the furniture was scanty.

One hot, breathless night, when the land-wind had died away, and the tent doors were opened to prevent suffocation, my sister woke with a sense of danger that made her glance through her own musquito curtains, at the little cradle placed by her bedside. But Annie, a wee thing only a few months old, was sleeping quietly, and had not stirred the net her mother had thrown over her cradle hours before. Again my sister slept, and once more she woke with the same feeling of fear; but still all was quiet, and the baby still slept on calmly. 'No doubt the stifling heat makes me restless,' thought my sister; and she tried to sleep again, and succeeded. A third time she woke, and now the stillness of the tent was certainly broken by a sound of loud breathing very near the bed. She sat up and turned towards the cradle. Such a sight met her eyes as almost turned her to stone!

"The interior of the tent was dimly lighted by a lamp of cocoanut-oil, placed on a table in the corner; and some of the bright moonlight found its way through the open door. At all events, there was light enough to show a savage creature hanging over the baby's cradle, its claws tearing at the net that screened the sleeping child, and its hot breath steaming over the little face, now but a few inches from the great white, hungry teeth! The mother's cry of horror awakened Charlton, and one glance showed him the horrible danger that threatened the child. His

pistol was already in his hand, but the savage beast had heard the movement, and turned from its prey. As it slunk out of the tent-door a shot passed within an inch of its head, but, alas! the creature escaped, and when I sprang from my bed, roused by the report of the pistol, I caught sight of the leopard galloping far away over the plain."

"What a dreadful story!" said Annie. "Did I wake and see the wild beast, Uncle Edward?"

"No, Annie, but your mother snatched you from your cradle and woke you with her kisses. Poor Maggie! she was cured of her love of living in tents from that time forward."

"I like to hear these stories," exclaimed Charlie, rubbing his hands with glee. "Have you been in India ever since you were a soldier, Major Ross?"

"Oh dear no! I have been in India ten years. First I went as an aide-de-camp, and when my old general returned to England I joined my regiment, which had come out to India in the meantime. When I first entered the army I was in Canada and Nova Scotia for some years."

"Did you have any adventures there?" asked Fred.

"Some few, perhaps," replied Major Ross, as he looked at his watch; "but I see dinner-time is near, and it is time for us to be moving."

"Just one more story," pleaded Tomtit, who had listened with open mouth to Major Ross's conversation.

"Tomtit, you are irresistible," was the reply. "Well, *what can I tell you?* Let me see. When I was in Nova

Scotia, and getting a little tired of it, I heard that a relation of mine was filling an official situation in the neighbouring island of Newfoundland. So, by way of variety, I got leave to go and pass three or four winter months with him, fancying I should have an opportunity of shooting bears and wolves, and immortalizing myself as a sportsman. In this hope, however, I was doomed to be disappointed. The only wild beast I heard of was a stray wolf, which devoured a cow, or was supposed to have done so, and which was killed by a fisherman after I had passed three bitter nights in a hole in the snow, vainly hoping to get a shot at the monster. Even the sleighing was poor amusement, after the smooth Canadian plains. However, my cousin was good-natured, and glad to have me with him, so we were cheerful and contented.

“The adventure I mean to relate happened in the month of February, when a severe frost had made the harbour safe for sleighs, and the snow lay so smoothly on it that the sleighing was more than usually agreeable. The landlocked harbour of St. John's is of considerable size, and its narrow entrance is between high hills with precipitous rocky sides, from every ledge of which, at the time of which I speak, hung fringes of icicles four or five feet long. The snow lay deep on hill and plain, and a brilliant sunshine made the scene dazzlingly bright, when one morning I set forth in my sleigh to pick up a lady-friend on my way, and give her the treat of a drive on the ice. My sleigh was of the kind called a ‘sulky,’ consisting of but two seats, one before the other, each only wide enough

to contain one person. I had painted it a bright red, thinking that colour would show to advantage on the snow, and my cousin facetiously called it the 'scarlet-runner,' which rather mortified me. However, my horse was young and fresh, and so was I; so, having found the lady waiting for me, I packed her up warmly in buffaloeskins, and away we flew, to the sound of jingling bells on the harness, down the hill, through steep streets, to the harbour. For a long time we careered merrily round and round, and when I looked back at my companion, or spoke to her, she answered with a laugh that rang out in the frosty air, as merrily as the sleigh-bells themselves. Suddenly, when we were in the midst of our enjoyment, a gun was fired from the deck of one of the vessels we were passing—some seal-fisher, perhaps, trying his gun, to wile away the time while his ship was fitting for the fishery. My horse, already excited by the rapid pace, took fright, and started off like the wind. My efforts to guide him were all in vain. He took the bit between his teeth, and flew over the crisp snow, without my having the slightest power of controlling him. Conceive my horror when a glance showed me that his head was pointed towards the mouth of the harbour, and that every yard he traversed in his mad race was bringing us so much nearer to the edge of the ice. A few minutes more and we must be engulfed in the dark water I saw beyond the gleaming whiteness! To throw ourselves out of the sleigh, hampered as we were with wrappers, and moving so swiftly *over the hard surface*, was impossible. All my strength

failed to have the slightest effect on the terrified horse. On he flew, without a check!

"For an instant I looked back at my companion. Her face was very pale, but calm, and her eyes were raised. I thought she was praying. That belief gave me new vigour, and my resolution was taken instantly. I loosened the reins for a few seconds, though the distance between us and destruction was now but a few yards. Then, summoning all my strength, I suddenly pulled one rein with hands and feet. Providentially, it did not break; the horse fell over on his side, and we were saved!"

"Oh, I am so glad!" exclaimed Bessie, who had been quite absorbed in the narrative. Major Ross turned to her with an amused look, and said—

"Thank you. So was I, I can assure you. But I must tell you no more traveller's tales to-day, or we shall be late for dinner."

As they walked home, Charlie remarked that Major Ross was a capital fellow—a sentiment in which all the young ones agreed, though some of them expressed it in more respectful terms.



CHAPTER XII.

THE STORY OF JESSY SHOWERS.

A FEW days after the walk mentioned in the last chapter, Major and Mrs. Ross were sitting with Mrs. Elvington in her drawing-room, when the door burst open, and Bessie entered almost hidden by a geranium in a pot, which she carried with both hands. As she entered she cried, "See, mamma, what a beautiful plant Jessy Showers has sent me! She raised it from a cutting last autumn on purpose for me." Then, perceiving there were visitors with her mother, Bessie was about to retire in confusion, but Mrs. Ross stopped her. Bessie liked pretty, gentle Mrs. Ross, and, putting down the geranium on a table, soon nestled to her side and inquired for the baby, while Major Ross, turning to Mrs. Elvington, said—

"By the way, the name of Jessy reminds me of some fellow-passengers of ours. Do you know a family named Cadmore, living on Coleham Common?"

"I seem to know the name," replied Mrs. Elvington, "*but I am sure there is no such family living on the*

common. There are not many cottages there, and I know the names of every family, I am sure."

"Then I fear our poor friends are doomed to disappointment," said Major Ross. "At Malta we took on board a Serjeant Cadmore, with a wife and three children. Emily and Mrs. Cadmore made acquaintance over their babies, and the Serjeant soon found out I was an army officer. He was a respectable man, and he told me he was sent home on account of his health, and hoped to get his discharge. He thought English air would soon set him up again, and he hoped to settle on Coleham Common, where, he said, his father had a little farm; and he and his wife both constantly spoke of their little daughter Jessy, whom they had left in England some years ago with her grandmother."

"It is very odd," said Mrs. Elvington; "I am sure I have heard the name, but I am afraid the people must have left Coleham."

"And who is Jessy Showers?" asked Major Ross.

"Jessy Showers is a very good little girl, with rather a romantic story belonging to her, and she lives with a worthy old couple whose grandchild she is only by adoption."

Mrs. Elvington proceeded to tell, in a few words, the story of Jessy Showers. We will do so at more length.

Old Jonas Showers and his wife lived in a small brick cottage some two miles from Coleham, surrounded by about five acres of field and garden enclosed from common. They had settled there on their marriage,

years ago ; and while they had health and strength, the produce of their little farm kept them in comfort ; but as they grew old and weak, their means dwindled away. The old man could no longer cultivate his land, he could not afford to hire labour, and he could not bear to make his poverty known. For a long time they managed to exist by the sale of the farming implements he could no longer use ; then the live stock went, even the fowls Mrs. Showers had so dearly loved ; until at last, when the old man had reached the age of seventy, they were in absolute distress.

One spring morning, about ten years before the time when Mrs. Elvington related their story to Major Ross, the old couple were seated before their fireless hearth, eating their scanty meal of dry bread, with no better beverage than water, for it was many a day since they had enjoyed the luxury of a cup of tea. They seldom spoke, for their hearts were very heavy, and when they did, their words were few and sad.

"We must come to it at last, Nancy," said the old man, with a sigh. "These rheumatics have crippled me so, I can't even use a spade now ; and you, poor soul ! are well nigh as bad. The relief we get from the parish isn't enough to keep body and soul together ; we must go to the Union !"

Tears rolled down the old woman's cheeks as she answered, "It's hard, Jonas, after an honest, hard-working life like thine. Forty years we've lived under this roof, *and never owed a penny*, and now to have to part in our

old age, and be no better than paupers! Oh, Jonas, I could wish I was dead before it should come to this!"

There was a silence between them for some time, and then a faint tapping sound went on at intervals, attracting at length the notice of the old woman, whose hearing was not very acute.

"I was thinking to ask you, Jonas," she said, "to cut off the long bough of the elder-tree that taps on the window; it sounds dreary at night—but, there, it doesn't matter now, it's all dreary alike!" and she hid her face in her apron.

"There's one thing to be thankful for, Nancy," said the old man, "and that is, that our Fanny isn't here to starve too."

"God knows where she is," answered the woman, with a fresh burst of grief. "She would marry a soldier, and go to foreign parts, or she might have been here to help us now!"

"Come, come, Nancy," said Jonas, "don't be hard on the poor girl. You were proud enough of her soldier-husband yourself, and she's no ways to blame for our trouble. Cheer up, old woman; may be better days will come yet."

Nancy rose and cleared the table, and then went to the door, which she opened, letting in a bright stream of sunshine and a breath of sweet, warm air. But a most unexpected sight met her eyes. Seated on the stone doorstep was a little child about two years old, with rings of yellow hair shining in the light. At the sound of the

opening door, the little creature paused in the humming song with which she had been amusing herself, and let a handful of dry sand glide through her chubby fingers on the heap of pebbles she had collected at her side, while she fixed a pair of laughing blue eyes on Mrs. Showers' face, and nodded her bright head by way of greeting. A sun-bonnet and a small bundle lay on the path, but no creature was in sight besides this little infant, who rose to her feet and faced the astonished old woman.

"Why, Jonas," exclaimed the latter, "come and see this pretty babe!" Then, as the old man raised himself with difficulty from his chair, and hobbled to the door, she stooped towards the child, and said, "Where do you come from, little one? What's your name, little dear?"

"Dessy!" answered the child.

"Jessy? And who brought you here, my dear?"

"Tim," was the reply; then, waving her little hand towards the garden-gate, while a shade of sadness came over her pretty face, she added, "Poor Tim! Tim gone! all gone!"

The old woman was by this time on the path before the cottage. She took the child's hand in hers, and went to the gate, but there was no one in sight.

"Where did you come from, I wonder?" she said, with a puzzled air, more to herself than the child, who began dancing along beside her, crying, "Dessy come! Dessy come!" as if it were a good joke. Jonas was standing at the door, full of surprise, when the child, catching sight of *him*, loosened her hold of Nancy, and, scrambling up the



Little Jessy





door-step, clasped the old man's knees, while she said, in coaxing tones, "Give Dessy cake, man! Please give Dessy cake!"

"Poor little soul!" he exclaimed, laying his withered hand gently on her head, "I've no cake to give you, but you're welcome to all I have to give;" and he tottered to the cupboard, took out the last bit of bread the house afforded, and put it into the child's hand.

Again she danced about, crying, "Dessy's come! Dessy's come!"

"Pretty creature!" said the old man to his wife, who meantime had been looking out in vain across the common; "what's to be done with her now? She lights up the old place like a ray of sunshine; but, all the same, that's the last crumb of bread we have in the world. What's to be done?"

Nancy picked up the bundle that lay on the path, and opened it. It contained clothes for the child, few but neat, and no letter or paper of any kind.

"I think she must have been left on purpose," said Nancy, "by the bundle being laid here. I'd better go at once, and see if I can find out anything about her; some one may have seen her pass before we were up this morning."

She put on her own things, tied on the child's little sun-bonnet, and prepared to leave the cottage. Jonas looked wistfully after the little figure as it tripped along the path, holding Nancy's hand.

"She'd make the place very cheery," he muttered, "if

we could only keep her; but there, we cannot stay ourselves, and it don't matter now."

He managed to creep to the gate to watch the pair, and smiled when he saw Nancy take the little one up in her arms and carry her along, but he could not hear the merry voice sounding clearly as a bird's song in the still air, crying, "Dessy's come! Do give Dessy cake!"

After awhile, Nancy turned into a farm by the wayside, and asked if any one could tell her anything about the child. The answers were all in the negative, but the good-natured farmer's wife, who suspected Nancy's poverty, fetched some warm milk for the little one, and made the old woman take some tea; then sent the pair on in a light donkey-cart, with her own son to drive them. The next person of whom Nancy asked information, had seen a man pass early in the morning carrying a child, probably this very child. He had not come from Coleham, but in the opposite direction; so Nancy determined to go to the turnpike some distance beyond Captain Elvington's house. The turnpike-man remembered the child at once. About five o'clock that morning a man, carrying her, had stopped to speak to him, had inquired where Jonas Showers lived, and been directed how to find his way. The man was a tidy sort of body, he said, but looked tired and very sickly. Yet he would not stop to rest, though he thankfully accepted some refreshment; then said he had no time to lose, and plodded wearily on.

"Did he tell you his name," asked Nancy, "or where he came from, or what he wanted with my Jonas?"

"No. He hardly spoke at all, he seemed so tired and weak. I heard the little girl call him 'Tim,' and he seemed very fond of her."

"Tim gone," interrupted Jessy, "Tim all gone."

"So it seems," said Nancy; and she determined to go and ask Captain Elvington, (who was then at home, and who was a magistrate), how she ought to proceed with her inquiries. He undertook the whole matter for her, and talked to her so kindly, that at last she poured out all her troubles to him, and told him of the poverty that had fallen upon them, and the sad prospect of the Union, which she and her Jonas were so unwilling to face. Captain Elvington was shocked and grieved.

"No, no, Mrs. Showers," he said, "your good husband and yourself have too many friends, and too good a name here, to be allowed to leave your cottage. I will call this afternoon, and speak to my old friend Jonas. Meantime, as you cannot have had time to attend to your cooking this morning, Mrs. Elvington will put a little basket into the cart for you. You must let us all help you to take care of this pretty child."

The basket put into the cart was *not* small, and Nancy went home with cheered spirits, while Jessy rejoiced in the possession of a large cake, which she insisted on sharing not only with the old woman, but also with the boy who drove the donkey. Jonas was looking out at the gate, and when he saw little Jessy, now fast asleep, he said, "Well! I see you've brought her back, and somehow

I can't but be glad. Lay the little lamb in my arms while you get out, Nancy."

He handled her very tenderly, but the movement woke her, and she looked up at him and laughed, raising her hand to play with his long white hair. Nancy bustled into the cottage, slowly followed by Jonas and his pretty burden, while the boy drove away, having refused to accept anything for his trouble.

A comfortable dinner, such as the old people had not seen for many a day, was soon spread on the board, and all dismal thoughts were put aside for the time. In the evening Captain Elvington came. He had ascertained that a boy keeping pigs on the common, had observed a man enter the Showers' gate early in the morning, with a child in his arms ; and had seen the same man afterwards walking alone towards Coleham. No more was known at present, but handbills were printed, and a reward offered to any person who could give information respecting the little Jessy.

Captain Elvington then told the old people that he had seen many of their wealthy neighbours since Nancy's visit to him that morning, and that so sincere a respect and regard were felt for them after their long life of honest industry, that all had combined to prevent Jonas giving up his old home.

"Sir Charles Danvers, Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, Mr. Ross, and one or two other neighbours," continued Captain Elvington, "have combined to offer you an annuity *which will keep your wife and yourself in tolerable comfort*

for the rest of your life. I want some more land, and will gladly give you four pounds a year for your fields, and I make myself responsible for the repairs of your cottage, and the occasional work of a day-labourer in your garden. Mrs. Elvington wishes to present Mrs. Showers with some fowls of a particularly fine breed, and Mrs. Charlton intends to send you a donkey and cart."

The old man listened, with his hands clasped tightly together, and long before Captain Elvington ceased to speak, tears had gathered in his eyes, and rolled slowly down his cheeks. Poor Nancy had hidden her face behind the child, who sat on her knee playing happily with a cup and a spoon. Jonas looked at the little one. "I said she came like a blessing," he said, in a tremulous voice. I don't know how to take your kindness and the other gentlefolks', sir. I never meant to ask any thing, and this goodness seems almost like a weight on me. Excuse me, sir, I find it very hard to speak."

"No need to speak," said Captain Elvington. "If we had known how things were, *we* should have tried to ease your mind long ago. Better days are come, my good friend. I shall send the builder to you to-morrow, and the fowls will soon be here, Mrs. Showers. I will let you know if I hear more of the man Tim."

"Tim gone," said Jessy, looking up from her play; "Dessy come, Tim all gone!"

Captain Elvington patted her fair head, and then shook hands with the old couple, who now were beginning to

recover the power of speech, and to utter thanks and blessings which he would not stay to hear.

A few days later he called to examine the builder's work, and to tell them all that he had been able to discover about the man "Tim." It appeared that a man answering to the turnpike-keeper's description had arrived by train at the little sea-side village of Saltry, in the evening of the day of Jessy's arrival at Coleham Common. He looked weary and ill, and was sorely disappointed on finding that the family of Phelan, for which he inquired, and to which he was supposed to belong, had long since returned to their native country of Ireland. He instantly took to his bed in the only little inn the place afforded, became rapidly worse, and died in three days. The woman of the inn said he was a respectable looking man; that he had paid her all he owed, given her money for his funeral the day before he died, and sent the rest of his possessions to some one in Ireland, she forgot where. His mind had often wandered, she said, and then he seemed to be always fancying he had a little child with him, and to be full of care about her. The very last words she heard him breathe as he sank to rest, were, "dear little Jessy."

"Poor man!" said Nancy, wiping her eyes, "Well he might love her, whatever kin she might be to him. She's a dear child, sir. I suppose we shall never know any more about her; but she's our child from henceforth, God bless her!"

So the little stranger found a home, and tender hearts to love her. Every one in the neighbourhood was interested to hear of the little foundling, and gifts were poured upon her and her old guardians, so that the aspect of the cottage was changed indeed. Ten years had passed, Jonas was now eighty, and his wife not much younger, but the comfort and ease of their lives had restored their health, and theirs was now a green and happy old age. Jessy had fulfilled the promise of her infancy, and was the darling of Jonas and Nancy, and the pet of all Coleham,



CHAPTER XIII.

THE DISCOVERY.

ALL this time we have left Major and Mrs. Ross paying a visit to Mrs. Elvington. Before they separated, it was arranged that the two ladies should be driven by Mr. Ross in the afternoon to pay some visits, while Major Ross, according to his frequent custom, would join the children in their walk. About four o'clock the two parties set out, the walkers going first towards Coleham, till they met Fred and Charlie returning from school, and then turning off across the common, as Bessie was anxious to call and thank Jessy Showers for the geranium. As they turned, they caught sight of a low chaise drawn by a pair of ponies, and followed by a groom on horseback. The chaise contained two persons, the one on the low seat, a lady reclining on cushions, looking very pale and wan; the other a portly individual wearing a high crowned white hat with narrow brim, and a light loose grey coat.

"Who, in the name of wonder, is this?" asked Major Ross. "*Is it man or woman?*"

Before he could be answered, the chaise stopped, and a loud, clear voice called out—

“How are you, Gerty? Why, Bessie, I have not seen you for an age! Come here, Mary and Annie, and all of you.”

There was no need for a second bidding. The young ones rushed towards the road, and were soon climbing into the chaise and clustering about the speaker, who kissed one and gave a hand to another, looking radiant with kindness.

“And so papa’s gone, Gerty, and you are all going after him? I shall be sorry, dear, and so will all your neighbours; but some day you must come back to the Red House. And my dear Harry came to wish me good-bye—”

“Yes, and you gave him such a beautiful spy-glass,” interrupted Gerty.

“Ah! don’t speak of it, dear. I love the boy with all my heart! Remember, you and Bessie are to come to Beauchamp Towers to spend a week with me before you go. And how is your dear mother, Mary Charlton?”

“Better, thank you,” answered Mary. “She has been so happy lately. Have you heard that Uncle Edward is come home? Uncle Edward, this is Miss Beauchamp Sauvry.”

Major Ross lifted his hat, and Miss Beauchamp Sauvry put out her hand, and said—

“Welcome, Major Ross. I was going to call on your wife, and I hope you will both some day find your

my strange old place. But I must not keep you now. I have promised my friend Miss Selwyn"—and she turned towards the pale lady beside her—"that I will introduce her to my dear friend Mrs. Charlton to-day."

After noisy farewells she drove on, looking back, with a smile on her broad yet pleasant face, and shaking her whip at Charlie.

"That is a curious person," said Major Ross. "Is she wearing out her papa's old hats?"

"Oh, please don't!" said Gerty, in a voice of distress; "please don't laugh, Major Ross! I know it looks very odd when you first see her. I can't think why she likes to dress like that; but I'm sure you wouldn't laugh if you only knew how good she is. I should not think there were many people in the world so kind as Miss Beauchamp Sauvry. Even Charlie never laughs now when she passes her fingers through her short hair and makes it stand on end—so please don't, Major Ross."

"Certainly not, Gerty. But who is Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, and how is she so good?"

"First of all," said Gerty, "she is the very last of her race."

"How romantic!" ejaculated Major Ross.

"Now you *are* laughing," said Gerty.

"No, indeed; I am only listening. Please go on."

"Well, she really is the last of a very old, old family, for an ancestor of hers came over with William the Conqueror. He was named Beauchamp, but in the Battle of *Hastings* he saved William's life by knocking aside a

Saxon battle-axe, and then he received the name of *Sauvroy*, which the king said he and his descendants were always to bear, in remembrance of his courage on that occasion."

"They were in Domesday Book," observed Bessie.

"Yes," continued Gerty, "they had a grant from William of all the land that Miss Beauchamp Sauvry holds now. Her father had a—what is it called?—a genealogical table of his family made out and emblazoned, and it hangs in the great hall."

"You have answered half my question very well, Gerty. Now tell me how this lady is so very good."

"She has a grand old house, and I believe she is very rich indeed," said Gerty; "but she does not spend money on herself or her own amusements. Her house is constantly full of people who are weak and ill, and who need country air and change of scene; but they are people who could not afford these things except for Miss Beauchamp Sauvry's kindness. You may often see the large drawing-room quite filled with people she has sought out on purpose to do them good. That lady who was with her to-day was a governess, who had been over-worked. She was in a family with whom Miss Beauchamp Sauvry passed a few days lately, and now you see she has her here to make her strong again. Besides all this, she has a number of orphan girls in her house learning to be servants, and she gets places for them, and never loses sight of them afterwards. Then, one house in the park is fitted up as a hospital for sick people who are never likely to get well; and she has

built a large wing to one of her farms as a hospital for sick children. You should see how glad they all are to see her when she goes in, and how kindly she takes the little children on her knees and comforts them in their pain and trouble. There is nobody half so kind as she is, I do believe."

"You have made me quite ashamed of having felt disposed to laugh at the hat, Gerty," replied Major Ross, "and I promise you I will never do so again. I shall soon make my way to Beauchamp Towers. You have made me long to go."

Gerty looked pleased. "I have only told you part of the truth, after all," she said; "but you cannot live here without hearing every day of some kind, generous action of our dear friend. She told papa that all her charitable plans would go on just the same after her death; but, oh! I do hope she will have a long, long life. I cannot bear to think of such good people going away, though I know it is best for *them*."

By this time the party were in sight of a red-brick cottage, which Bessie said was the home of her friend Jessy Showers. The garden in front of it looked gay with early summer flowers, and Jessy was training a honeysuckle over the porch, and talking to the old man, who stood sunning himself on the path. Bessie's cordial thanks for the geranium gave great pleasure to the modest little maiden. Nancy came out on hearing the voices, and begged her young visitors to come and see a brood of *chickens* at the back of the house. Major Ross was duly

introduced to the old couple, who were delighted to see a brother of Mrs. Charlton, and an officer.

"Ah, sir!" said Nancy, "our Fanny went and married a soldier—a steady, good young man; but there! she's wandered all over the world maybe, and here we are, not knowing whether she's dead or alive. If it hadn't pleased the Lord to send us our Jessy, we should have had a sad time; but she seemed to bring a blessing with her, and we've never wanted for kind friends since the day she came."

The chickens were admired to the old woman's content, and then she led her visitors round the orchard, and showed Major Ross the fields which Captain Elvington rented, the children following with Jessy. All this took time. As they returned to the garden in front of the cottage a cart stopped at the gate, and there was a confusion of voices, while several persons descended from the vehicle. Presently a man opened the gate, and a woman, with a baby in her arms and two children following her, advanced eagerly towards the cottage. As she caught sight of the group, now standing still in surprise, she stopped also, looking first at the old man leaning on his stick, then at Nancy, who had advanced a little, and then stopped trembling and wondering. By this time the man had followed, and he took the baby from the woman's arms and urged her gently forward. She came towards Nancy, holding out both her hands, and crying, in a piteous voice, "Father, mother, is it really you? Don't you know your own Fanny?"

Yes! Nancy had already recognised her, and clasped her in her old arms before the words were half uttered.

Then the new-comer raised her head from her mother's shoulder and said, "Where's my child? Surely my Jessy is safe and well?"

Little Jessy came forward, very pale and wondering, and Jonas, as he grasped his daughter's hand, said, "*Your* Jessy, child? Our little foundling, *your* Jessy!"

Fanny could not answer just then; she was looking at Jessy, and tracing in her sweet modest face the features not seen for years. Major Ross, meantime, had advanced towards the man, in whom he had at once recognised his fellow-passenger, Serjeant Cadmore. A few words explained one mystery. Jonas Showers was the father of Mrs. Cadmore—the serjeant had spoken of his father-in-law, not of his father, as living on Coleham Common—and the name of Showers had never been mentioned in his conversations with Major Ross.

But there was another mystery to be unravelled. Had Jessy really found her parents? Was she indeed Jessy Cadmore, and were these her brothers and sister?

"I'll tell you how it was, mother," said Mrs. Cadmore, as soon as she could speak again. "We were ordered to leave Gibraltar, and to embark in a troop-ship for the West Indies. Tom was a baby in arms then, and I was but weakly. It chanced that Cadmore's best friend was coming to England, having got his discharge, and he came to us and said, 'I'm going to pass through Coleham. Give me little Jessy to take to her grandmother. You're

going to a bad climate in a crowded ship. I'll take care of her, and give her up safe; and she'll grow up strong in England.' It was a hard parting, but it was for the child's good. So we let her come."

"What was the name of the man that brought her?" inquired old Jonas.

"Tim Phelan," answered Serjeant Cadmore. "He was an Irishman, but he had friends down at Saltry."

The truth was plain now. Tim had probably tried in vain to rouse the old people from their slumbers, and feeling the child was safe, and that he was hourly becoming weaker, had hurried on in the hope of finding his family; then death prevented any further communication. As neither Jonas nor Nancy could read writing, and the Cadmores were not ready with the pen, no letters had passed between the parties; but nothing could be more delightful than the present explanation.

Major Ross called his young friends together, and left the happy re-united family discussing their future plans; while the hospitable Nancy was endeavouring to make room for her welcome guests to sleep in the cottage. Cadmore, no longer Serjeant, for he had obtained his discharge from the army, was to turn his sword into a plough-share, add two rooms to the cottage, and take into his own hands the management of the little farm, including the fields which the Elvingtons had rented. It was all delightful, Bessie declared, "better even than a story in a book."



CHAPTER XIV.

THE SAD FATE OF A KITTEN.

THE school at Coleham, to which Fred and Charlie went daily, had gradually dwindled, from various causes, till five boys only remained. These, besides our friends, were a certain Tom Neville, the son of a gentleman whose tutor Mr. Butler the schoolmaster, had been in former days, and two young Nicholsons, sons of the Coleham doctor, quiet, well-behaved little boys, much younger than Charlie. Tom Neville was a tiresome boy, whom Mr. Butler had only allowed to remain with him so long out of regard for his father. He had been a rebel against all who had endeavoured to control him from the time he was a babe in arms, and was as quarrelsome as his ugly little terrier, which he had appropriately named "Worry."

One Saturday afternoon, when the usual hour had arrived for the boys to disperse for their half-holiday, Tom Neville asked Fred and Charlie, who were putting up their books, to take a walk with him. Both declined *at first*, Fred saying his uncle wanted him, and Charlie

giving no reason. Tom waited till Fred had left the room, and then stopped Charlie as he was following, saying, in a jeering tone, "And is Miss Charlotte going out for a walk with her dear sisters and their nursery-maid? Why, Elvington, I wouldn't be such a molly as you for anything! Not even to dare to go out with a friend!"

Charlie coloured with annoyance, and said, "You know I'm no molly, Tom. I *do* dare walk where I choose."

"Come with me then," said Tom; "it's better fun to see Worry run after a cat than to be tied like a girl to your nurse's apron-string."

Charlie knew his father disliked Tom, and he had no liking for the boy himself, but from a weak fear of not seeming manly in the eyes of a companion who deserved his contempt, he agreed to accompany him. The two boys set out together with Worry at their heels, and made their way through the fields to the other end of the town.

"Come," said Tom, at length, "it's dull work in the fields. Let's go home by the street. We shall be sure to have some fun."

Accordingly, they left the fields and entered the town of Coleham. Just at its edge was a detached cottage, with a line of trees in front of it. Here, on the stone before the door, lay a large black cat, enjoying the sunshine, and blinking occasionally as if to be aware of any approaching danger. Tom was in raptures at the sight. He whistled to Worry (who had lingered behind to ~~tease~~

a dog smaller than himself), shouted "Cats! cats!" and clapped his hands violently. Charlie followed his example. Worry rushed towards the cat with loud barking, and up sprang the cat. In a second Worry had received a sharp blow in the face from his enemy's claw, and the black cat was blinking at him from a bough high above his reach.

"Well done, puss!" cried Charlie, much diverted at the dog's discomfiture.

Tom did not seem so much amused, but walked on, calling Worry to follow and keep close, in rather a sulky tone. No more cats were to be seen till they had almost reached Mr. Butler's house, and then they caught sight of little Susie Jones, daughter of the principal grocer, followed by her favourite kitten. The child and her pet were almost equally playful, and evidently very fond of each other; and many people had noticed them with pleasure as they walked down the street. All this was nothing to Tom Neville. Once more he clapped his hands and shouted, "Cats! cats!" and Charlie, excited by his example, shouted and clapped his hands also. There was a bark, a rush, a shriek of grief and terror from the little girl, and then Charlie saw Tom hurrying away, calling his dog to follow, and the pretty kitten lying dead on the path. At the same moment a stern voice exclaimed, "What is the meaning of this?" and with long, angry strides, and grave countenance, Major Ross came upon the scene.

"Charlie Elvington!" he continued; "is it possible? *Captain Elvington's son cruel?*"

Then he turned away, as if he scorned to say more to Charlie, who, grieved and ashamed, instantly went home. Major Ross took the hand of little Susie and tried to soothe her, for she was sobbing piteously over the body of her favourite.

"I am very sorry for you," he said.

"Wicked, wicked boys!" cried Susie; "I never will forgive them for killing my pretty cat!"

"Don't say that," said Major Ross. "I hope they will be very sorry by-and-by. Let me take you home. Where do you live?"

"Up the street," answered Susie,—“but I must take my cat with me;” and there was a fresh burst of tears.

"Certainly; if you will lift up your pinafore so, by the two corners, I will put poor Pussy in so; and you can carry her home, and dig a hole in your garden and put her into it. Come along! you must show me the way to your home."

The oddly-matched pair walked up the street together, talking as they went, and Susie was much consoled by the sympathy of her companion, the melancholy pleasure he had suggested of burying the favourite in the garden, and the hope he held out of his niece's sending her a new kitten before many days should pass.

The same evening, in the dusk, Major Ross was walking up and down the common, when the little figure of Bessie crossed the road and intercepted him. She looked extremely grave, and her voice was almost solemn as she said, "If you please, Major Ross, I want to speak to you."

"Certainly, Bessie; and, in order to hear you better, I will sit down here;" and he threw himself on the turf.

Bessie stood before him, still very grave. "It is about Charlie; he is so unhappy."

"He ought to be unhappy, Bessie. He was in bad company, and he acted with great cruelty."

"I know he was very wrong," continued Bessie, "but I want to tell you about it, Major Ross, because it was not quite so bad, perhaps, as you think. Charlie is so miserable; he says you will never care for him any more, and he was afraid to come and speak to you; so then I said I would come and tell you just the plain truth."

She proceeded to relate the adventure of the black cat, and her happy escape into the tree. "You see, Major Ross," she continued, "when the dog ran after Susie Jones's kitten, if Charlie thought about it at all, he thought the kitten would get out of the way. Indeed, indeed, he never thought such a very dreadful thing would happen! Do believe me, Major Ross, Charlie is not cruel—indeed he is not, and he cannot bear you should think him so. He would be very unhappy about the shocking thing that happened to-day, even if you had not seen it. He is going to take Susie his best rabbits to-morrow morning, and beg her pardon; but nothing will make him happy if you don't forgive him."

"Charlie is a lucky boy, Bessie, to have such a kind little sister," answered Major Ross. "Tell him to come and shake hands with me, and we will forget this business altogether. I am sure he never meant to be cruel, and he *has had* a lesson on the folly of keeping bad company. I

know Mrs. Elvington does not like Tom Neville, and Charlie should not have been with him."

"Thank you," said Bessie; "Charlie will be so glad."

She departed, and soon returned with Charlie, very crest-fallen and quiet. Major Ross shook hands with him kindly, spoke a few words on the beauty of the evening, and then wished the two children good-night.



CHAPTER XV.

BESSIE'S MISFORTUNE.

T WAS talking to Major and Mrs. Ross yesterday," said Mrs. Elvington one day in the beginning of June, "about our all having a pic-nic during this lovely weather, in Bensley Park. I asked Sir Charles Danvers if we might go there while he and Lady Danvers were in London."

The proposal was received with delight. Charlie's holidays had begun, so that all of the family now at home were free for the whole day, and at Mr. Ross's no one but Mrs. Charlton was to be excused. Even the old gentleman himself was persuaded to join the party, and an early day was named, that there might not be time for a change of weather.

No one was more eager in making preparations, or more delighted at the whole plan, than Bessie; but, alas! she was doomed to disappointment. On the very day before the longed-for Thursday, she was rushing down stairs with a basket, in which provisions were to be packed for the morrow, when she trod on a marble that Tomtit had *carelessly left on one of the steps*, slipped, and fell to the

bottom of the flight, with her foot doubled under her. Mrs. Elvington heard the fall, and a suppressed cry of pain, and hurried to see what had happened.

Bessie was very pale, but she tried to smile, as she said, "Don't call me awkward, please, dear mamma. Give me your hand to help me up, for I have twisted my foot under me somehow."

But she found she could not get up. The effort gave her so much pain that she felt sick and giddy, and Mrs. Elvington lifted her from the ground, carried her to the drawing-room sofa, and sent immediately for the doctor. Bessie lay quite still for some time, then suddenly starting up, cried, "Oh! Mamma, I shall not be able to go to-morrow, and I did wish it so much!"

Her eyes filled with tears. Mrs. Elvington kissed her, and said gently, "It is a sad disappointment for you, my little girl, but I am sure you will not be able to go. I will stay at home with you."

"Oh no, no, mamma," cried Bessie, "that would spoil everybody's pleasure. Indeed I am not so selfish as to wish you to stay. Promise you will go, mamma."

She would not be pacified till her mother promised to go, provided Bessie should be comfortable, and tolerably free from pain. The conversation was then interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Nicholson, the doctor, who said there was not much harm done, but the foot must not be used for some days, and the pic-nic was, of course, out of the question. Bessie made him add that Mrs. Elvington might leave her without anxiety, and then she whispered to her

mother, "Could you not ask the little Nicholsons to go, mamma? They are good little boys."

Mrs. Elvington at once invited them, and the father seemed pleased, and said they should come.

The news of Bessie's misfortune soon reached the other house, and quite late in the evening Major Ross and his wife came to inquire, and were full of kind interest about her. When they saw that their sympathy had made her eyes fill with tears, Mrs. Ross cheered her with a promise of an early visit from the wonderful baby; and the Major said, "Emily thinks the baby a cure and consolation for every trouble that any human being can be afflicted with! Now, Bessie, I'll tell you my plan. We go at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, I believe, Mrs. Elvington? Well, Bessie, at half-past nine I shall come here, take you gently in my arms, and carry you to the cottage, where I shall lay you on a comfortable couch in my sister's sitting-room, and there you will pass your day, not very unhappily, I hope."

"How kind, how very kind!" said Bessie, colouring with pleasure. "Will dear Mrs. Charlton like to have me? I shall be so happy to be with her!"

"I don't think she will object to your coming," said Major Ross; "if she does, I will let you know in the morning. Meantime, she is anxious to hear how you are, so Emily and I must wish you good-night."

Thursday came, just the right sort of day for a pic-nic, as every one avowed,—warm, sunny, and still. Breakfast was scarcely over at the Elvingtons', when Major Ross entered, to fetch Bessie.

"Mrs. Charlton sends her love," he said, "and thinks she can endure Miss Elizabeth Elvington's society for a few hours;" a message which made Bessie smile.

Gerty tied on her sister's hat, and kissed her; and then Major Ross took Bessie in his arms so tenderly that she felt no pain, and carried her to her dear friend. Mrs. Charlton was already dressed, and reclining in a large arm-chair near the open window. Fresh flowers, sweet June roses and mignonette, were on the table, and close beside Mrs. Charlton's chair, was the couch, on which Major Ross laid little Bessie. The greeting of the invalids was most tender, and presently Mrs. Ross came in to say good-bye, and carry off her husband, promising that the baby should be brought in after his early nap. Holding her dear friend's hand, and looking into her kind, patient face, Bessie could hear the noise of departure from below without a pang.

"This has been a sad disappointment for you, my child," said Mrs. Charlton; "you were looking forward so eagerly to this party."

"I felt very sorry last night," answered Bessie, "but I don't think I feel at all sorry now, here with you. If I had been alone at home, I might have been very sad, but I am always glad to be here. But oh!" she added, a moment afterwards, "how selfish of me to talk of my little disappointment to you, dear Mrs. Charlton—you, who never can go out, and who suffer so much!"

"No, dear," replied Mrs. Charlton, smiling, "not selfish; I do not think anybody but yourself could ever call you

so, Bessie. Besides, I have been so long schooled to my quiet life, that I have ceased to wish for any change. It is no disappointment to me to stay here, and not join the pic-nic, even if I had not my little friend to keep me company."

"But to suffer pain!" said Bessie. "When my foot hurt me so much last night, I could not think of anything else; I felt as if I could not bear it, it seemed so dreadful. Yet I have heard Mary say, that when you were ill last year, you suffered great pain, sometimes for many days and nights without any rest. Oh! how *could* you bear it?"

"It was hard to bear at first, Bessie, and there have often been times—often, often—when I have felt a sort of terror that my power of endurance would fail, and have said to myself, 'If this goes on long, or becomes ever so little worse, how shall I bear it?' I have felt as if to toss my arms wildly, and shriek aloud, would be almost a relief. May you never experience suffering like that, my little Bessie! I only speak of it to show you how far 'patience' is from having her 'perfect work' in me."

"But you do *not* give way, dear Mrs. Charlton."

"Thank God! Bessie, at such terrible moments there is help for those who seek it. One thought of the Great Sufferer; one breath of hope from that other World, where pain is unknown, and new strength comes to our poor weary spirits. It is God's patience, not ours, dear, that carries us through all our trials, whether of soul or body. But this is grave talk for our holiday. You know I was *positive* as my brother himself once, and the memory of my

old pleasures is a great pleasure still. I hope you like my brother and sister."

"Indeed I do," said Bessie, warmly. "You cannot think how kind Major Ross has been to us all, and how much we enjoy our walks with him; and I quite love Mrs. Ross, she is so sweet and gentle. How glad you must be to have them here."

"Very glad, Bessie; and we hope the regiment is coming home, to remain some time in England, so we may look forward to frequent meetings. You can fancy how Edward and I talk of the dear old Quantocks, and the merry days of our childhood."

"I should like to hear you sometimes," said Bessie, smiling. "Did you say the old grey house had been pulled down? What a pity!"

"It was a great grief, I assure you; but when it came into my father's possession on the death of my grandmother, it was found that the timbers were all decayed, and the house positively unsafe to live in, so it was taken down. I saw it after the roof was off, and I cannot say how sad a sight I found it; so I went round to take a last look at all my old haunts, and then departed, never to revisit the neighbourhood. If you ever go to that part of England, Bessie, you will delight in its beauty. The green Quantock hills, with the wooded valleys, or combes, running between them; the beautiful old parks and woods scattered thickly over the country; the glimpses of the blue hills of Wales seen across the water, where white sails are passing frequently;—all these charms combine to

make such views, as seem to me unsurpassed in beauty by any I have known in more celebrated parts of the world. We were not far from the pretty place where Coleridge and Wordsworth once lived, mentioned in Wordsworth's lines about the little boy and the weather-cock. The house is on the side of a lovely valley—but all seems lovely to my recollection, from the stately woods of Nettlecombe to the little mountain sheep scattered over the hills. You, who always admire my black oak cabinets, would be delighted to see how common such carving is in even small houses in Somersetshire. I have heard that gangs of workmen from the Netherlands, driven from home for their Protestant faith by the cruel Duke of Alva, used to go about the country seeking employment as wood-carvers, and that the quantity of old oak-carving we find scattered about Somersetshire is their work. Why that part of England seems to have been the special scene of their labours, I really don't know."

Here, the arrival of the baby put an end to the conversation. He was a pretty child, with a grave and dignified air, breaking now and then into pretty playfulness. Just now, he seemed full of wonder because Bessie, generally his devoted slave, did not run to pick up the toy which he appeared to drop expressly for that purpose, and his glance had in it something of gentle reproach. He was soon, however, on the couch beside her, submitting to her caresses with tolerable grace, and even at last laughing aloud when she tickled him. When tired of Bessie, he *sat for a few minutes on Mrs. Charlton's knee*, though he

could only be induced to do so by being permitted to suck her watch. When he departed for his walk, his aunt, Bessie, and the nurse, all assured him he was the best and sweetest child in all the world.

Dinner was laid on a small table in the recess of the window. After it was over, Mrs. Charlton sent for some books of sketches to show Bessie, who loved to hear her friend talk of the places she had visited. Then Bessie tried to copy one of the views, with the help of Mrs. Charlton, who sometimes gave her lessons in drawing, and encouraged her to persevere. Afterwards, a little reading and working, and then came the tea.

"Oh! how early the tea is brought to-night," said Bessie; "why is it come so soon?"

Mrs. Charlton showed her watch, and Bessie was astonished to find that the hands pointed to seven o'clock. It seemed the shortest day she had ever known, and so she declared it to be.

"I am very glad you have been happy," said Mrs. Charlton, kissing her; "we shall have our friends returning soon after tea, and hear their adventures. I am very sorry for your fall, Bessie, but it has been a pleasure to me to have this quiet day with you, as it will not be very long before you leave Coleham. Your mamma tells me you are going to pass some time at your uncle's before you sail for Malta."

She led Bessie to describe her uncle's house and park, and they chatted pleasantly over their tea, till the sound of many voices under the window warned them that the party had returned from the pic-nic.



CHAPTER XVI.

A DAY IN BENSLEY PARK.

THE pic-nic had proved a very successful one, with fewer misadventures than are apt to occur on such occasions. Soon after the party set out (Mrs. Elvington driving Mrs. Ross in the pony chaise, with Tomtit seated at her feet, and the rest walking), they saw an open carriage coming towards them, and, in a few minutes recognised their friend, Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, driving her pair of ponies. She stopped to speak.

"Why, you are early abroad," she cried, in her loud cheery voice. "Where are you all going? I thought it would be too soon to pay visits, or I should have stopped at your door presently. I have just taken my friend, Miss Selwyn, to the station, quite renovated by our good air. You look all the better for it, Mrs. Ross. But, after all, where are you going?"

Several voices answered; and Mrs. Elvington, as soon as she could be heard, added, "Do come with us, Miss Beauchamp Sauvry; you will add very much to our day's pleasure if you will join us."

A chorus of young voices seconded the invitation.

"Really," said Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, looking gratified, "well ! you are very good to wish for me, and I will gladly come."

Calling her groom, she gave some directions in a low voice, and he rode off towards home, while she turned her ponies' heads towards Bensley, made old Mr. Ross and little Annie Charlton get into her chaise, and took the lead in the cheerful procession.

"I miss my little Bessie," she said, looking round ; "why is she not here?"

Bessie's absence was explained, and the accident regretted ; and by that time the lodge of Bensley was in sight, so the two carriages paused to wait for the walkers, who were but a little way behind.

There had been much merriment among them on the way, and much discussion as to the proceedings of the day. The dinner was to take place on a knoll above Mother Hadlow's cave, on account of the convenient proximity of Mother Hadlow's excellent spring of cold water. The recurrence of this name struck Major Ross, who asked what sort of person Mother Hadlow might be.

Gerty laughed, as she answered, "Oh, she is no person at all, only a tradition, Major Ross ; but the poor people here tell wonderful tales about her. They seem to think she was a kind of fairy, who lived in the inner part of the cave, and was never seen by anybody ; but she was very benevolent, especially in the way of lending her washing-tub ! If any person went to the entrance of the cave

overnight, and called out, 'Please, Mother Hadlow, lend me your washing-tub,' sure enough the tub was put there before the asker returned in the morning. As long as the tub was put back when done with, all went well; but, alas! it happened that a dishonest woman stole it, and Mother Hadlow never heeded anybody's request afterwards. Don't you think they might have imagined something a little more romantic than a washing-tub? It quite grieves Bessie, I assure you."

"It is sadly matter-of-fact, certainly; but when did this wonderful lady live?"

"Not so very long ago. They say their grandmothers often borrowed the tub. The cave is the subject of a great many wonderful tales. Some people say it stretches ten miles, and that a duck put in at Bayford came out here at Bensley, only without any feathers. Some believe Mother Hadlow was affronted, and plucked the bird; others, that the feathers were rubbed off in passing through the narrow parts of the cave!"

"Look, uncle," interrupted Mary, "those beeches are the largest in the neighbourhood; finer even than those at Beauchamp Towers. Don't they *feather* beautifully?"

Major Ross stood still and gazed with delight at the beautiful group of trees, clothed in their bright young leaves.

"Sir Charles Danvers is very proud of them," remarked Fred; "but our Charlie prefers cedars."

"For shame, Fred," cried Mary; "you said you would *not talk about that* any more."

"Let him," said Charlie, "I don't mind ;" but he coloured a good deal nevertheless, and walked on ahead with the Nicholsons. Fred called out :

"Shall I come with you, Charlie ; or do you know a leading shoot by this time ?"

No answer was returned, unless a twist of Charlie's shoulder and a faintly-murmured word that sounded very like "bother !" might be so considered.

"What is this, Mary ?" inquired her uncle. "What is Fred teasing Charlie about ?"

"The fact is, uncle, that the last time we went, Charlie had a great heavy ball, and he unluckily began tossing it about near the house, just where some royal person, who had been staying at Bensley a short time before, had planted a foolish little cedar-tree. The ball hit the tree and broke a tiny bit just at the top, but Sir Charles Danvers said it was the leading shoot that was destroyed, and made such a commotion about it, that poor Charlie cannot bear to hear the name of a cedar-tree now."

"Even the sight of a cedar-pencil was odious for a time," said Fred, in a voice loud enough to be heard by Charlie, who turned to punish him, and then the two had a wild, laughing race all the way to the lodge.

It was delicious to rest on the thymy slopes and look up through the roof of green leaves to the soft summer sky. The boys wandered far and wide about the park, which was remarkable for its wild beauty, but the rest were satisfied to be quiet for a time ; the little girls and Tomtit listening to a new book which Gerty read aloud, while

their elders sat apart discussing the day's paper. About noon, Mrs. Elvington proposed to guide Mrs. Ross to a favourite point of view, for the purpose of sketching; Mr. Ross took his son to look at a shady pool that was a famous place for fishing; and Miss Beauchamp Sauvry approached the young ones, and sat down among them on the mossy roots of an old beech, begging they would go on with the reading. The story was near an end, and when it was quite finished and had been freely discussed, she proposed a walk. All the recesses of the park were familiar to her, and she promised to keep the children in the shade, and to show them a bend of the stream that flowed through the wood, where the flowering rush might be already in blossom. Meantime, what had become of Fred, Charlie, and the two Nicholsons? They had made a plan which they had not communicated to anybody, to explore Mother Hadlow's cave, and thither they had gone as soon as their friends were settled under the trees at some distance from the spot.

The outer chamber of the cave was of considerable size, seven or eight feet high, and piercing the sandy soil to a depth of eighteen or twenty feet, beyond which distance there was a low passage, such as even a boy could only traverse on hands and knees. Through the centre flowed a rill of the clearest water, which had dug itself a channel, leaving the floor of the cave on each side of it quite dry. The boys took off their jackets and prepared to crawl along the small passage, which, according to common report, expanded into a second chamber at some distance from

the mouth of the cave. Fred was about to lead the way, when Charlie cried—

“Stop, Fred ; suppose we take some sticks in with us. It would be great fun to make a fire in Mother Hadlow’s best parlour !”

Dry sticks were soon collected and tied into bundles, one of which was to be pushed before him by each boy as he crawled along.

“But how are we to *light* the fire?” suggested the younger Nicholson, whose name was James.

“Pooh !” said Charlie. “Do you think I would come to a pic-nic without matches in my pocket? Why, we shall want a fire for tea by-and-by.”

So, without further delay, down they went on hands and knees, and, one after the other, pushing their several burdens, advanced along the low passage, which was much longer than they expected. At last the roof began sloping upward, and presently they reached a sort of chamber, in which they were able to stand upright. The sides, too, receded considerably, and when Charlie struck a light, and even produced a bit of candle with which he had provided himself, with a view to the present expedition, the boys found they were in a cave as large as the outer one, with the little rill running through it, and a passage, somewhat higher than the last, appearing to lead farther on.

“Let us go on,” cried Charlie ; “but first we can light a fire here, and it will burn up while we are gone. I will tie the lighted candle on to my cap and lead the way, as the poor little miners used to do.”

They heaped up wood and dead leaves till they had made a large pile, set it alight, and then hurried on, preceded by Charlie with his candle, which burnt but dimly now. The passage grew narrower and lower; they were obliged almost to lie down and force themselves along; but still the excited Charlie cried, "Onward!" and rejected all Fred's entreaties that he would return. At length they reached a wider place, and here Fred insisted on their turning back, which indeed they could hardly have done before where the way was so narrow.

"Come!" cried Fred. "Willie Nicholson, turn round, my man. Why, James, what's the matter? Here, Charlie, bring the candle!"

Willie Nicholson looked scared and bewildered, as if scarcely knowing where he was; but James was pale as marble, with closed eyes and lips apart—a sight to terrify them all. Moreover, they all began to be sensible of a stifling smoke stealing towards them from the fire they had lighted, and making them feel giddy and confused. Fred was roused by the danger.

"Give me your handkerchiefs directly, and away with you, Charlie and Willie! Trust to me to bring James, and get to the entrance of the cave as fast as you can!"

He snatched the handkerchiefs and tied them together, then knotted on to them his own and James's (which he had taken from the poor little boy's pocket), thus forming a long string, the ends of which he fastened to his own ankles. Then, kneeling down, he contrived to slip the loop thus formed over James's chest and under his arms,

as the boy lay on his back. All this time the smoke was increasing, and Fred feared every moment that his own senses would desert him. He rallied them with a strong effort, threw himself on the ground, and worked his way on and on through the narrowest part of the passage; then, as the way widened, the blinding, suffocating smoke grew thicker, and when he reached the cavern in which the fire was burning, he thought it would be impossible to cross it. One desperate effort, and he had passed into the other passage and felt the fresh air blowing in. A minute later, and he had dragged his insensible load to the grass before the entrance, untied the handkerchiefs, and taken up water in his hands to sprinkle on James's face. Charlie and Willie stood by, excessively alarmed; but Fred's efforts were soon crowned with success. James opened his eyes, sat up, and looked about him, asking where he was and what they were doing with him. He was soon ready to laugh at his misfortunes, and at the appearance of his companions, blackened with smoke and rather abashed by the result of their exploring-trip. They washed their faces and hands in the stream, and left Mother Hadlow's dominions with very little desire ever to explore them again. They determined to take a quiet stroll to fill up their time till two o'clock, which was the dinner-hour, and they were so fortunate as to direct their course to the shady pool, where they found Major Ross, to whom they told their story. He took charge of them and saved them from further mischief, till it was time to go to the place of general meeting.



CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT THE STREAM SAID TO THE RUSHES.

MISS Beauchamp Sauvry, holding Tomtit by the hand, conducted her young friends through a wooded dell to a group of old oaks, beyond which was the bend of the stream they had come to see. A large drooping willow, with a rustic seat under it, grew just at the angle, and here they established themselves.

"Now, is not this a charming spot?" said Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, taking off her hat and placing it on the ground, while she passed the fingers of the other hand through her hair. "See how the long light leaves dance and quiver in the wind that breathes upward from the water! Just look at those lovely forget-me-nots across the stream, and the fresh meadow-sweet (I do so like the name!), with its creamy blossoms and tinted buds! This is a beautiful world that you live in, my children!"

She stopped speaking, and seemed listening with delight to the tinkling of the stream, the rustling of the leaves, *and the sound of song that fell in bursts from the sky,*

where a little brown speck might now and then be seen rising, till it was lost in the cloudless blue. After a while she said, "Talk of stories, children! Listen, and you will hear better stories than there are in books. Everything tells you a story—the wind, and the lark, and the willow-tree! Listen!"

"I don't hear any story," replied Tomtit, looking very much puzzled.

"Ah! my dear," said Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, "you are too young to understand the language yet;" and she patted his cheek with a kind smile. "Little boys only know their mother-tongue, and need to have things explained. I hope you will understand when you are a man, or I shall pity you."

"Won't you explain now?" asked Annie.

"You little rogue! is that what you want? Let me see! Well! Look down just at our feet, where the rushes (not in blossom, alas! Gerty) grow so thickly. Do you observe that between them and the bank there is a little space where the water is quite still, or rather seems so, for if you watch it for some time you will see that after slowly eddying there, it in reality flows out on the other side, and mixes again with the main stream. And while it eddies there, don't you hear how it whispers to the rushes? Do you see the drop that carries a tiny flower? There it goes! That very drop has been whispering here this half-hour, and has told the rushes all its history. I am going to tell you what it said, in your own language.

"'Ah!' exclaimed the drop, as it reached this delicious

shady nook, 'dear rushes, how glad I am to find myself here after the heat of my journey! The sun has poured down upon me all the way.'

"'Whence do you come?' inquired the rushes.

"'Well, I will tell you,' said the drop. 'The first thing I can remember is, that I was rushing along above the earth at a prodigious rate, when, before I could look round me, and see what sort of company I was in, there was a sudden flash of light, with a tremendous burst of sound, and in a moment I found myself falling, falling, with thousands of other drops on every side of me. I fell on a little flower that grew on a hill-side, but my fall was so heavy that it beat the poor blossom down, and I slipped out on the turf, and sank down through earth and gravel till I reached a cavern, from whose roof I descended at once into a pool below. It was a dark, dismal place, to be sure, but I had plenty of companions in misfortune, so we joined together in a friendly manner, and determined to make the best of it. Still, I had my sad moments. To live always in the dark was very dreary after the glimpse I had had of the green earth. But this was not to be. I had noticed a rise in our position, which a neighbour told me was caused by a tiny stream that filtered into the cave; and now I was lifted so nearly to a level with a chink near the roof that I began to meditate an escape. One day, or one night, the roof began to drip into the pool. Thick and fast came the new drops, plunging on our heads, and rapidly filling the cavern. It was too much to bear. I watched my opportunity, and presently, followed by a

stream of my fellow-prisoners, dashed through the chink out into the air and the sunshine. Oh how we sang and chattered among the grass and the cresses! How we ran down the hill and leapt into a river that was rolling lazily by!

“Once in the river, our pace was so slow that I had time to look about me. Passing the garden of a little cottage, I got entangled among some plants, and was delayed for some time. A woman was coming out, carrying a sick child, and I heard the little one say, “Down to the river, mother; please take me to the river! I long to see it again.” The mother brought him down to the bank, and I saw his little white face smile as he watched the stream with the sunbeams playing so merrily on its bosom. A little breeze whirled me on, and when I paused again I was close under a bank where two children were standing, swimming a small boat. It was all very pleasant for some time, but, in trying to disentangle the string, which had caught in a bush, one child fell into the water, while the other stood shrieking on the bank. I must say I felt alarmed, but suddenly something dashed over me, driving me from my quiet nook. I managed, however, to look back, and saw a huge dog swimming to the bank, with the child’s clothes held firmly between his great teeth, so I knew it was all right. For a long time I moved on so slowly and quietly, that I thought my life was to be a very easy one. But, my dear rushes, it is when we have been long tranquil that we should fear a storm! When I least expected it, I found myself sucked into a narrow passage

in which a gigantic wheel was turning round and round, lashing the waters into a foam. Oh, what I suffered! Caught up by this monster, carried to a perilous height, thrown down, caught, and carried away again; stunned by an incessant clickety-clack, clickety-clack; beaten and bruised, with my nerves absolutely torn to pieces, I escaped at last from the cruel mill-wheel, and flew headlong down a precipice into the meadows. Decreasing our speed by degrees, I and my companions enjoyed the scent of the new-mown hay, and were amused by the voices of the haymakers' children, who were picking flowers on the bank, and then tossing them on the water. One little blossom fell just on my head, and I have worn it like a crown ever since. From the meadows we passed into the park; and here we are, beloved rushes, obliged to leave your cool nook and wander on—who can tell us whither? Farewell! farewell!

“So ends the story of the Drop,” continued Miss Beauchamp Sauvry. “Some day I may tell you the story of the Willow-tree, but it is too sad for a day like this. It would speak of a little girl who was once my playfellow under its boughs, and then of a little green grave far away. We will not talk of it now.”

The story of the Lark, and that of the Wind were, however, related, but must be left to the reader's imagination.

As the hour of two drew near, the scattered parties might be seen wending their way towards the spot appointed for the dinner—a smooth piece of shady turf above Mother Hadlow's cave. The little girls were soon busily

employed in helping the servants to arrange the dishes on the cloth that had been laid on the grass, while Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, on her knees, gave herself to the task of mixing the salad, an art in which it was her pride to excel. The feast was spread at last, and all the guests were assembled round it, seated on the ground, in the shadow of tall beeches, whose feathery boughs, waved by a gentle breeze, were like great fans cooling the summer air. There were glimpses, between the trunks of the trees, of distant fields sleeping in sunshine, making the green gloom and coolness seem still more delightful.

"This is charming!" exclaimed Miss Beauchamp Sauvry; "and especially so to me, who rose this morning without dreaming of such a treat."

"There is only one thing I could wish different," remarked Major Ross; "I wish people would not burn weeds so near our sylvan dining-room. Don't you perceive a slight smell of smoke?"

Charlie started, and then turned an imploring look on Major Ross, who had promised not to mention the adventure of the cave. He almost fancied the blue smoke might be seen curling upward from the cave's mouth; and each of the boys felt extremely uncomfortable all the time that the elders of the party were wondering where the burning weeds could be; nor were they much relieved by Major Ross remarking that, for his part, he thought the smell was more like that of burning wood, and he fancied Mother Hadlow must have been lighting her oven.

"I even fancy I feel the ground warm just here, don't

you, Fred?" he continued, with a mischievous glance at his nephew.

Fred's reply was inaudible ; but the conversation soon passed to less dangerous subjects. Towards the end of the meal, great excitement was caused by the approach of two servants of Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, one bearing ices, the other a large basket of strawberries, the agreeable result of her whispered orders to her groom in the morning.

After this dessert, there was a general demand for some music, and Miss Beauchamp Sauvry led several catches and rounds, in which most of the children joined, even Tomtit, upon whose conscience the fatal marble, the cause of Bessie's tumble, had lain like a leaden weight all the day, and whose voice was not unlike the squeak of the "three blind mice," of whom he sang. Before the party rose, the full, rich voice of Miss Beauchamp Sauvry poured forth one of her favourite songs, the whispering leaves and the coo of the wood-pigeons making a fitting accompaniment, as she sang :—

" Under the greenwood tree,
Who loves to lie with me,
And tune his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat,
Come hither, come hither, come hither !
Here shall he see no company
But winter and rough weather."

It was cool enough now to ramble over the park, and visit Lady Danvers' pet village, composed of six picturesque cottages built round a green, in the midst of which *was a very elegant pump*. Then Major and Mrs. Ross

were conducted over the house, to see some few valuable pictures, and a great deal of costly furniture. The gardens were more attractive, and the housekeeper's proposal to spread the tea-table on the lawn near the house was received with delight by old and young. .

The golden sunset was fading into grey when the party separated with mutual congratulations on the happiness of the day.



CHAPTER XVIII.

AN AGREEABLE SURPRISE.

BESSIE'S ankle proved more seriously injured than Mr. Nicholson had at first supposed, and kept her a prisoner to the couch for many weeks. Charlie was very disconsolate, for Bessie, at all times his great friend and favourite, had ever been his almost inseparable companion during his holidays. All that could be done was to pour out his troubles to her sympathizing ear, which he was ever ready to do. Mrs. Elvington was busied with preparations for moving, and Gertrude was of great use to her mother; besides, Gerty had been Harry's companion, and was too old for Charlie. The Charltons, Fred and his sisters, were gone to the seaside for a few weeks with their uncle and aunt; in short, the state of affairs was such, that Charlie felt much aggrieved.

"What *is* a fellow to do?" said he, drearily, kicking the bar of a chair on which he sat near Bessie's sofa. "These are the dulllest holidays I ever had in my life. I declare it's a shame of Major Ross to go and take Fred away. Oh I wish you hadn't tumbled down stairs!"

Bessie could not help laughing as she answered, "I am sure I wish I hadn't, Charlie."

"Yes, you may laugh," said he, "but it's no laughing matter to feel as dismal as I do. I went and tried to do a little carpentering this morning, and nearly sawed off my thumb, so there's an end of that amusement. Everything seems to go wrong."

He got up and walked to the window.

"Look at this, too," he continued, "this great bill stuck in the window, so that one can't see out of it."

"Oh, Charlie, what nonsense!" cried Bessie; "the bill only covers one pane of glass."

"I don't care," persisted Charlie, "I maintain that if there's one thing that makes a house look more dismal than another, it's having bills stuck in the windows, with 'This house to let' printed on them. And what's the use after all? There's nobody to see it but the cows on the common, and Farmer Wells' donkey."

"Some people must have seen it," replied Bessie, "for a gentleman and lady came with their daughter while you were out yesterday, and asked leave to go over the house. Oh, Charlie! you can't think what fun it was! They stayed in here a long time, and took no notice of me, though I coughed very loud. 'This is what they call the drawing-room, I suppose,' said the lady. 'I can't say much for it. Just look how the carpet is worn near the door.' 'I believe there are two or three clodhopping schoolboys,' said the young lady, with a toss of her head, 'so what can you expect?' I coughed again very loud,

but they went on finding fault with everything; and only fancy, Charlie, the old gentleman said at last, that mamma seemed a ladylike sort of person enough!"

"He did, did he?" said Charlie, fiercely. "I wish I'd heard him, that's all. He wouldn't have forgotten it in a hurry, I can tell him."

"Mamma laughed very much when I told her," rejoined Bessie, "and said she was much obliged to the old gentleman."

"Gentleman!" echoed Charlie, with scorn, "much you know about gentlemen! But I say, Bessie, when shall you be well? Couldn't you just come out in the field and see me shoot? It wouldn't hurt you to walk such a little way."

Bessie was very sorry for him, and though she knew she must not try to walk, she lay still, considering what could be done to cheer his loneliness. Suddenly, with a cry like that of a wild Indian, he sprang to the window, and flew into the garden. Bessie leaned forward on her couch to find out what had caused this sudden excitement, and saw Major Ross coming up the garden walk. Her welcome was quieter, but not less sincerely glad, than her brother's, and Mrs. Elvington soon made her appearance with Gertrude, to greet the unexpected visitor. Even Tomtit, who had been building castles with wooden bricks in his mother's room, came rushing down stairs at the sound of Major Ross's name. When the first burst of questions and answers had subsided, Major Ross explained *the purpose for which he had come.*

"First of all," he said, "I hope you have not let your house yet?"

"No, indeed," answered Mrs. Elvington. "We have only had one party to look at it, and they seemed to scorn it in a manner that quite wounded Gertrude's feelings."

"That is well," continued Major Ross, "for a friend of mine has written to ask me to find him just such a house as this, and I have ventured to appoint him to meet me here this afternoon. I have very little doubt that he will be delighted to become your tenant."

"Thank you!" said Mrs. Elvington. "This would save me much trouble and anxiety."

"Nay, I deserve no thanks. We could ill bear to see strange faces in this house, Mrs. Elvington. But I must proceed to the second object of this visit. I met Nicholson, your doctor, in the train, this morning, and was sorry to hear from him that my dear little friend here was still laid up. I inquired if he thought a trip to the sea-side would do her good, and he replied, 'All the good in the world.' He seemed to be of opinion that sea-water would be useful in restoring the poor ankle, and he promised to call on you by-and-by to tell you so. We have no room for her in our lodgings, but there are some pleasant rooms vacant close to us, and if you will let Bessie go there with her old nurse, Mrs. Ross and I will be aunt and uncle to the child. You consent, I hope?"

Bessie was flushed and trembling with expectation; and Mrs. Elvington would have found it hard indeed to resist

the pleading, "Oh, mamma, pray do!" that burst from her little girl's lips.

"I consent, most thankfully," she replied, smiling. "The journey is the difficulty, for she can bear very little movement without pain."

"Well, there is a charming arrangement for the journey," continued Major Ross. "Just now Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, who is calling on my sister, mentioned that she was going to Saltry to-morrow, and when I told her of my wish to get Bessie thither, she said she would take her, not in the pony-chaise, but in her large open carriage. She will call presently to settle with you about the hour of departure."

This was delightful news for Bessie, but it caused Charlie's spirits to sink lower than ever. As Major Ross turned, he caught sight of the boy's woe-begone countenance, and could not resist laughing at the expression that sat so oddly on that round, rosy face.

"Never mind, friend Charlie, I have not done yet. Do you think your mother could possibly spare you for a fortnight? If so, there is a vacant bed in Fred's room to which you are welcome; and I do suppose, from appearances, that your society must, at times, be rather oppressive to your friends here."

The change in Charlie's look was a sight to see; and he gave utterance to one of his wild Indian yells of delight without being in the least aware of it. Mrs. Elvington confessed the truth of Major Ross's suspicions, but added, *that she feared her boy might give trouble at Saltry.*

"Oh dear no!" answered the Major, with a merry glance at Charlie; "I shall quite enjoy keeping him in order. You will be astonished at his gentleness when you see him again. Fred and I go out sailing almost every day with a friendly old waterman, and there are very pretty walks all round, so we shall find plenty of amusement. But I must go back to my father now. In the evening, if you will allow me, I will carry Bessie to drink tea with my sister, who is longing to see her dear little friend. By-the-bye, won't you send Tomtit to Saltry, too?"

"I was thinking of it, answered Mrs. Elvington. "It will do him good, and leave Gerty and me more at liberty for the many things we have to do before we can leave this house."

Major Ross left bright faces behind him at the Red House, and he was scarcely gone before Miss Beauchamp Sauvry appeared at the gate.

"I am glad to hear you agree to my plan," she said, as she shook hands with Mrs. Elvington. "The lodgings Major Ross recommended to you are kept by an old servant of mine, for whom I have a great regard. She has written to me about a little difficulty that has troubled her, and I am going for a couple of days to try to set things straight for the good woman. There will be room for us all in the house; but you had better send nurse off with the luggage by the early train, and I will call at ten o'clock for the young ones."

The kind speaker would wait for no thanks, but hurried away, carrying off Charlie to drive her ponies to the end of

the village. Gerty ran upstairs to tell nurse to pack up for the morrow's journey, and Tomtit retired to put away his bricks.

"How kind everybody is!" exclaimed Bessie, as she took her mother's hand and leaned her cheek on it. "It seems so ungrateful to be glad to go away from you, dear mamma, after all the trouble you have had with me; but you know I cannot be of any use to you till I can walk about."

"Never fear, Bessie; I shall not think you ungrateful;" and Mrs. Elvington stooped down and kissed her. "I am delighted that you should go!"

Major Ross kept his promise of fetching Bessie in the evening, and it was a great joy to her to find herself once more in Mrs. Charlton's room. She had not been there since the day of the pic-nic, five weeks before, for Major Ross had been away, and nurse could not venture to carry her farther than from her bed to the sofa in the drawing-room at home. Mrs. Charlton listened with her usual kind sympathy to all that Bessie had to tell, and then said,

"When you come back, Bessie, you must tell me everything you have seen and done at Saltry, and I shall almost fancy I feel the salt breeze blowing in my face again."

"Oh, if you could only go too!" exclaimed Bessie; "you love the sea so much, and you can never, never see it. I am so sorry!"

Bessie looked into her friend's pale patient face, with *tearful eyes*, but Mrs. Charlton smiled, as she replied,

“Nay, Bessie, it is not well to think and feel in that way. I am quite happy, dear. Mind you bring me some sea-weeds ; I don’t care how common they are—indeed, I like the common ones best, for the sight and touch of them will remind me of the time when I was a little girl living in the old Grey House.”



CHAPTER XIX.

THE ORPHANS.

THE next morning rose bright and fine, and, punctually at ten o'clock, Miss Beauchamp Sauvry arrived in her large barouche. Major Ross was at hand to lift Bessie into the carriage and place her on the largest seat, where she could almost lie down. Miss Beauchamp Sauvry placed herself opposite, with Tomtit beside her. Charlie swung himself into the rumble with the maid, and Major Ross mounted the box. Every one of the party was in high spirits, and Gerty might be forgiven if a wish rose in her heart to go with them. It lasted but a moment, however, for she felt an arm thrown lovingly round her, and heard her mother's voice say, "I almost wish you were going too, Gerty; only what would become of me without my useful little helper? I really could not spare you." There could be no regret after this, and Gerty exerted herself more than ever to assist her mother, who was the more anxious to hurry her preparations, as Major Ross's friend seemed pleased with the house, *and willing to take possession of it as soon as possible.*

Meantime, Bessie was rolling along in the easy carriage, amused by the frequent fire of jokes kept up between Major Ross and Charlie, and encouraged by Miss Beauchamp Sauvry's cheery laugh. It was now August. The red poppy and blue scabious shone gaily among the golden grain in the wide cornfields by the wayside. Here and there the harvest had already begun, and the reapers wiped their heated brows as they stood up to watch the travellers pass. About noon, when the air had become very sultry, the carriage drew up at a little wayside-inn, half-hidden among huge horse-chestnut-trees, and here they determined to stop till the heat of the day was passed. Bessie was soon laid on the horsehair couch in a little parlour looking into the garden, and left to rest, while the others sat under the chestnuts. In vain she declared herself too happy to be tired; they insisted on leaving her alone; and, after counting the gay roses on the walls of the room, listening to the bees that hummed round the bunches of clove-pinks outside, or the great drones that came sailing along to the window and then receded again till they were out of hearing, she fairly fell asleep, and did not wake till the rosy little maid of the inn was spreading luncheon on the table.

At three o'clock the journey was resumed. The country was wilder, and the cornfields had given place to commons, now purple with heathblossoms, varied in places with dwarf gorse and stunted fern. After a long stretch of heath the road swept upward between woods of low fir, till it reached the crest of a hill, where the carriage stopped.

and Bessie, with a cry of joy, echoed by Charlie, saw, just below, the horn of the little bay of Saltry, with its silver sands, and the sparkling sea sending in the tide in quiet little wavelets that hardly disturbed the children playing on the shore.

"There, Bessie!" cried Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, "see how 'the many twinkling smile of ocean' welcomes you to Saltry!"

They drove on to the lodgings, where nurse awaited them, and the landlady came out, full of joy, to receive her old mistress. Bessie looked pale and tired, so she was laid on the sofa, while the rest went down to the sands, and Miss Beauchamp Sauvry promised to come in at six o'clock to drink tea with her.

"Nobody else must come to-night, dear," she added, "and I shall send you to bed after tea, but to-morrow you shall stay out all the day, if you like."

Bessie heard the merry voices as if in a dream, when she lay resting near the window, while through all, and mixed with all, was the soft, regular beat of the rising tide. She hardly knew what happened afterwards, but in the morning she woke in a little white bed, with nurse standing by waiting to dress her. She soon remembered where she was.

"How soundly I have slept, nurse!" she exclaimed.

"Indeed you have, Miss, and it's a good thing you could, with Master George so near you."

Bessie now observed Tomtit standing by, with rather a *disconsolate* air.

"Why, what is the matter, Tomtit?" she asked.

"Oh! Miss Bessie," answered nurse for him, "it's only his nonsense and fidgettiness. He kept on calling to me all night, because there was somebody talking in the next room. Of course, in a lodging one can't help hearing people's voices, if they will talk, but there's no need to wake other people up to listen to them."

"But, Bessie," pleaded Tomtit, "I should not have minded their talking, but I am sure they were very unhappy. I heard them crying and sobbing—oh, such a long time!—and then I got frightened."

"How very odd!" said Bessie. "Perhaps we shall hear what other lodgers there are in the house. If there is anybody unhappy, Tomtit, depend upon it Miss Beauchamp Sauvry will find them out and do them good."

"I shall tell her," said Tomtit, gaining courage from Bessie's interest; and when her couch had been wheeled into the next room, and Miss Beauchamp Sauvry was making the tea, Tomtit told his tale. He had the satisfaction of seeing his new hearer listen to him with great attention. She even held the spoonful of tea suspended over the teapot till he had done; then she laid it down and patted his head.

"Well done, Tomtit!" she said. "You will be a chivalrous man, with ears so alive to the voice of distress! Do you know," she continued, collecting the scattered tea-leaves, "it is on account of those very people whom you heard talking and crying last night that I have come to

Saltry. I mean to carry them off to Beauchamp Towers in the barouche to-morrow."

"I said so!" cried Bessie; "I said you would comfort them, if you only knew."

"I will if I can, dear," she answered, with a sigh; "but we must not forget there are troubles which no human help can cure. These are orphans. You will know more of them by-and-by. Come to breakfast now, dear children. Tell me, Bessie, what is this I hear about the Red House being let in September?"

"I believe Mr. Coulson, a friend of Major Ross's, will take it for a year at least," replied Bessie; "and he wishes to come into it early next month. Mamma has promised that we shall all pass some weeks at my uncle's at Marley Hall before we leave England, so the time would suit her very well."

"Then you and Gertrude must come to me for the first week in September," said Miss Beauchamp Sauvry. "Tell Gerty, when you write, that she must get all her business done in time to fulfil her engagement with me."

Bessie promised with a very smiling face, for nothing could be more delightful to either herself or her sister than a visit to Beauchamp Towers.

After breakfast Tomtit took his wooden spade and ran out to the sands, while Mary Charlton came for a moment to tell Bessie that Major Ross had found a little old carriage, in which she could be dragged to the beach and sit all day, but it wanted some slight repair, and would not be ready for use till the afternoon.

"You won't mind lying there," said Miss Beauchamp Sauvry to Bessie, when Mary was gone. "Here are books, and here is your work. I am going to talk to Mary Norton, our landlady; so you can hear, if you like, something about our fellow-lodgers."

"I may listen then? Oh, thank you! I want to know about them:" so Bessie took her work, and prepared for the gratification of her curiosity.

"Come in, Mary Norton," said Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, in answer to the landlady's knock; "sit down here, and tell me about this business, all the ins and outs of it, you know. You wrote me word that you had two young ladies living in your house, and that they were so unhappy you did not know what to do with them. As to the unhappiness, it seems only too true, for Master George declares he heard them crying and sobbing in the night."

"Ah! that's just it, ma'am," rejoined Mrs. Norton. "They cry and cry, and what am I to do with them?"

"Where did they come from? How came they here?"

"Well, ma'am, it's a long story, but I must tell you from the beginning. There's a lone cottage about a mile after you leave Saltry, out Dorsetshire way, a tidy little place, belonging to an old widow-woman, who lets the best part of it, and attends upon her lodgers herself. About four years ago she had a chance of letting her apartments to a gentleman with two children, and he took them by the year, and not, as others had always done, just for the summer and autumn. The gentleman was called

Mr. Smith. He seemed to know nobody, and seldom got any letters, but lived quite to himself, not even taking much notice of the little girls ; but he paid for all he had, and gave very little trouble, so nobody had a right to find fault, especially as he went to church regularly, and often gave a trifle to the poor. Soon after he settled at the cottage, he sent his little girls to school at Southerton, but they came home twice a year for their holidays, and then their father seemed to get very fond of them. They used to come running before him down on the sands, laughing and playing together. Poor man ! he must have missed them when they went back. He always looked worn and sad. Some said Smith was not his real name ; that he had seen better days, but had got into trouble through some dishonesty to his employers, whoever they might be. I'm sure I don't know, but he was a miserable-looking man, who seemed hardly to know how to smile. The young ones loved him all the same, and cried whenever they went back to school. When they came home for these last holidays, Mrs. Purday, the widow-woman I told you of, thought he seemed weaker, but fancied it might be the hot weather. However, one day at the end of June he passed away quite suddenly. I heard of it the same night, and went up to see if I could be of any use. It was sad enough, indeed, ma'am. Old Mrs. Purday could not afford to keep them, and so—after all was done—I brought the young things here, and said I would spare them a room, and they could pay me a trifle for their board."

"I dare say it *is* a trifle, Mary."

"Well, ma'am, they should have been welcome without paying, as long as I had it to give; but I thought it might hurt their feelings to be living on alms. Poor little things! they're sadly ignorant. After all claims paid, there's about thirty pounds a year between them for everything, and they seem to think that is quite enough."

"Have they no guardian?" asked Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, "and no relations?"

"There was a mention of a cousin among their father's papers, so I advised them to write to him. He answered very coldly, that he was sorry he could do nothing for them, and recommended them to stay with the respectable woman they mentioned (meaning me, ma'am) as long as she was willing to keep them."

Miss Beauchamp Sauvry looked perplexed. "What are they fit for, Mary?" she asked. "Are they well-taught, sensible girls?"

"Not very, I'm afraid, ma'am," replied Mrs. Norton. "You know I saw a good deal of life when I lived with you, and a great many real clever ladies; but I am afraid these have been at a poor sort of school, where they learned very little. One of them can make wax fruit, and the other can cut out paper flowers; but what's that when you come to want to earn your living? They say they used to think they might take pupils when they were grown up, but I don't see what they could teach. One has a sweet voice for singing, I believe. But now they are sunk into such a sad state, I cannot rouse them to do

anything; so I ventured to ask you to come, ma'am, and I'm sure you'll advise and help them."

"I will try, Mary, you good soul; but you have been their first friend, and they must not forget that. I will go to their room after dinner, but don't tell them. It will be better to take them by surprise. I must not keep you longer now. I hope your good deed will bring a blessing on your house, Mary."

Mrs. Norton rose to leave the room, saying, "I could not live so many years with you, ma'am, without learning to try to help others."



CHAPTER XX.

SALTRY.

BY three o'clock Bessie was reclining in her little carriage on the sands, watching Major Ross and the boys, with the old waterman's help, push the boat off, and shake out the canvas ready for a sail. Mrs. Ross sat on the shore with the baby on her knee, while Mary and Anna Charlton wandered away to look for shells.

Bessie lay back on her cushions, thoroughly enjoying the scene, but she could not help her thoughts straying back to the conversation she had heard in the morning, and she longed to know the result of Miss Beauchamp Sauvry's visit to the young orphans. It was a relief to find that Mrs. Ross had heard of the two girls, and was willing to talk of them; indeed, if baby had not been ill with his teeth, and requiring all her attention, that lady would have gone to see the poor young creatures some time ago.

Meanwhile Fanny and Emmy Smith little dreamt of the interest they were exciting. They were sitting together,

trying to mend some of their clothes, and succeeding awkwardly enough, when some one knocked at the door, which was opened before they could reply, and a kind face looked in upon them, seeming to fill the very room with brightness. The girls rose, and Fanny, fancying it was a lodger who had mistaken her way, civilly offered to conduct her to her own rooms.

"No, thank you, my dear," answered the cheery voice that all who had ever heard it loved to hear again; "I am not come by mistake. I am come to offer to be a friend to two poor little girls who are very lonely, so let us sit down and talk the matter over;" and Miss Beauchamp Sauvry took a seat as she spoke. Then she explained to them very tenderly their real position, and showed them how little they could do with their thirty pounds a year, and also how little they could teach others until they had acquired more knowledge themselves. "But," she continued, "I will do my best to put you in the way of helping yourselves. I will take you to my house, and give you masters and teachers, so that you may really fit yourselves for the task of teaching children. Only you must be obedient and tractable."

There seemed little doubt of their gentleness and submission, and they were full of tearful gratitude to their new friend. Emmy had slipped her hand under Miss Beauchamp Sauvry's arm, and Fanny had held her hand, almost from the beginning of the conversation.

"Now then, my dear children," she said, as she rose and kissed each of them on the forehead, "we have done



The Orphan Girls



talking on business, so get your hats, and come out into the sunshine. Mrs. Norton will help you to put up your things when we come in, and you must drink tea with me."

"Good little affectionate, gentle girls, I can see," observed Miss Beauchamp Sauvry afterwards, in Bessie's hearing. "I dare say they will do very well, but they want *bones*, my dear Mrs. Ross, they want *bones*!" a remark which puzzled Bessie, but by which Mrs. Ross understood that there was less energy of character than the speaker would have wished to see. They had sweet fair faces, very like each other, and they were fourteen and fifteen years old, timid and shy, but very grateful for kindness.

How pleasant it was on the beach that evening! The wind had fallen, and those on the shore could hear the merry voices of Major Ross and his companions as they folded their sails, and took to their oars. The few fishing-boats in the offing still caught a light breeze; but as they neared the land, they too dropped their sails, and the measured dip of their oars came floating across the waters. The sun had set, a violet mist hung above the sea, and the moon was shining out full and clear, before the party of friends could resolve to go indoors.

The next day, at an early hour, Miss Beauchamp Sauvry left Saltry with the two Smiths. Every one was sorry for her departure, and Bessie's spirits hardly recovered it all day, though her attention was diverted by the treatment which Nurse began to apply to the ankle, according to the doctor's directions.

A proud woman was Nurse, when, after all her sponging, and rubbing, and douching, Bessie was able, after a few days, to walk across the room without pain. By the end of the second week, the little carriage was discarded, and Bessie might be seen, mounted on the only donkey the village of Saltry could boast, ready to accompany the walking party to look for fossils in a curious cavern some three miles off.

"You're going out Dorsetshire way, miss, arn't you?" said Nurse, as she wrapt a shawl round Bessie's feet. "You'll pass by the cottage where those Miss Smiths used to live; and, do you know, Miss Bessie, Mrs. Norton has been telling me that their landlady, Mrs. Purday, used to keep the inn in the village, and I do think she must be the person that was so kind to the poor soldier, Tim Phelan."

"The man that brought Jessy Cadmore home?" said Bessie. "I will ask her, and she will not have heard, perhaps, what we have found out lately. I forgot it was at Saltry that the poor man died."

Major Ross was calling his party together, and in a few minutes they set forth, leaving Mrs. Ross on the shore with her baby. The little fellow was robust and healthy now, and needed plenty of watching, for his favourite amusement was to crawl over shingle and sand to the edge of the water, and try to catch the spray as it danced in the sunshine, then seat himself, and gravely examine his fat hands inside and out, glancing at his mother, as if to *ask what had become of the glittering treasure.* Catching

sight of the water, he was on his knees again, plunging forwards with shouts and screams of delight, never weary of his amusement.

"That's right! Try again, my boy!" cried Major Ross, looking back as he walked beside Bessie's donkey. "He is like an English child now, but he looked miserable enough in India. Why, Bessie, almost the first time I saw him, he was laid on a piece of matting, with a thing like a wire dish-cover over him to keep off the mosquitoes. He looked like a little cream cheese."

"Oh, Major Ross!"

"Indeed, it's true, Bessie. If that young gentleman could write his memoirs, you would acknowledge he had gone through many troubles. Once he had been sleeping for an hour on a mat laid on the floor, while his mother sat watching him. At last he opened his eyes, and the ayah came forward and took him in her arms, and then began screaming violently, and bidding my wife follow her out of the room. Mrs. Ross did so, wondering what was the matter, and looking back as she reached the door, she saw the hooded head of a cobra—a poisonous snake—just above the place where the baby had lain. The creature had been coiled up under the mat all the time the child was sleeping, and it was merciful that no movement had disturbed it till the ayah came."

"How dreadful it must be to live in fear of such things!" said Bessie, shuddering.

"Even the harmless things are not pleasant at all," continued Major Ross. "In one house we had for a

or two at Bombay, on our way home, there were swarms of frogs. As soon as the darkness fell, the frogs came hopping in at the doors and windows. Upstairs and down, they were near us and upon us. You will ask if they walked up stairs, and I wondered at first how they got to the upper story; but one day I saw a little one run up the wall just as easily as a fly does, and then the mystery was explained. In the same house we had swarms of cockroaches, and armies of musk-rats. You good people in England don't know how well off you are, to have none of these plagues."

Old Mrs. Purday was busy in her little garden, tying up the pinks which thrive so well in the sea air. Major Ross spoke to her, and she came to the gate to enjoy a chat. She had been very glad to hear from Mrs. Norton, she said, that her poor young ladies had found a friend. They were good young ladies, and their father had been a quiet, good gentleman, though he hadn't much to say to anybody.

Bessie asked if she remembered Tim Phelan, and she answered, "Oh, yes! I might have forgotten the name, only a gentleman from Coleham came and asked a many questions about him, and that fixed it in my mind. Did you ever find out where the little girl came from, miss?"

Bessie told the story, to which Mrs. Purday listened with the utmost interest, and many exclamations of, "Well, to be sure!"—"See there now!"—"Only to think!" At length Fred and Charlie began to show signs of impatience, so Bessie took a kind farewell of the old woman, and the whole party moved on. Their way lay over smooth sands, *till they neared the end of their walk, when they came in*

sight of cliffs shelving upward from the shore. The cavern they proposed to visit was in one of the nearest of these, and the approach was by a zig-zag path from the beach, only to be reached at low water. Just now there was a broad strip of shingle and mud at the foot of the cliffs, and the tide had not yet turned, so there was plenty of time for exploring, while the south-western sun shone right into the cave, and lighted its farthest recesses.

Imbedded in the walls of the cave, which were of a substance like petrified mud, were the fossils they had come to seek; shells of delicate forms, and strange shapes, that might be flowers or animals. The strangest thing seemed, that among these "mummies," as Bessie called them, laid by in their hidden tomb for thousands of years, there were some that seemed to her eyes just like the mussels and limpets that were living and moving on the shore below.

Major Ross had led the donkey up the zig-zag path to the cave, but Bessie begged to be allowed to go down on foot, and accomplished the descent very comfortably. After she had mounted again, several baskets laden with curiosities were hung to the saddle, and Annie Charlton rode part of the way home seated on her knee. The lingering walk back to Saltry was delightful, the breeze coming in with the rising tide, full of freshness. As they neared home, they saw Mrs. Ross on the shore, and the baby still making frantic dashes at the dancing foam.



CHAPTER XXI.

THE DOOM OF THE RADSTOWES.

OH, Bessie!" cried Major Ross one day, as they sat down to dinner, "I have such a delightful piece of news for you! I have made a discovery that will rejoice your heart."

All were eager to know what it was, and Major Ross by degrees related his morning's adventures.

"I have been this morning," he said, "to the top of the hill we were remarking the other day, to the left of the village. There is a charming view there, as I expected; and I was fortunate enough to meet with a person who could tell me the names of all the gentlemen's seats within sight. My friend was an old man, who went up there to watch his cow, as she was apt to stray sometimes farther than it was convenient to him to follow. He said he had lived about here ever since he could remember, and he told me many a long story of Squire This and Squire That, whose grandsons now own their property. At last, I asked 'What are those trees just on the edge of the farthest hill to the eastward?'

"The old man looked in the direction to which I pointed, and replied, 'Those be Storrham Woods, sir.'

"'And to whom does Storrham belong?' I inquired.

"'Why, nobody knows, sir,' he answered. 'It was owned by the Radstowes for hundreds of years, but now the heir's lost, and the place is in chancery.'

"'The heir lost?' I repeated, pricking up my ears for Bessie's sake, knowing she dearly loves a bit of romance. 'How came the heir to be lost?'

"'Well, I'm sure I forget, sir,' said the old man; 'it's a long time ago, and my memory isn't what it was; but if you've any *curosimy* about it, you'd best go to the place. An old servant of the family lives in the house now, and you might hear from her all you want to know.'

Mrs. Ross was as eager as the young ones for an expedition to Storrham, but it was far beyond a walk. Her husband had thought of this, however, and hunted up a light-wagon belonging to a farmer in the neighbourhood. This, drawn by two strong horses, was at the door early the following day, the wagoner arrayed in the whitest of smock-frocks, and with a gay ribbon twisted round his whip, while green boughs sheltered the horses from the sun, and flowers adorned their ears. A sofa-cushion and several pillows were thrown into the wagon, and room was found in it for the whole party. At a good pace, and with no more jolting than was considered agreeable, they passed through quiet lanes, up and down steep hills, and across breezy commons, till, at the end of two hours, they reached the boundary of Storrham. Here they all insisted

on walking, so the wagoner unyoked his horses and shook down an armful of hay for them under the trees, where the fine creatures stood enjoying themselves, and shaking their great heads till the bells on their collars jingled merrily.

The entrance to Storham was by a gate, rusted on its hinges, and, close by, was a lodge no longer inhabited, with planks nailed across its windows. The road was scarcely to be discerned (so thickly was it overgrown with coarse grass) except by the outline of the wood, which it skirted for some distance, then winding to the left, it could just be traced across the park, round the edge of a lake, up the rising ground to the house. The leaves of many an autumn lay under the old trees, and the lake was covered with sedge and weeds; but it was impossible to imagine anything finer than the woods of Storham, here clustering in a hollow, there sweeping over the crest of a hill; while many a giant oak or elm stood proudly alone, where it had stood for centuries. There was a rookery in some Scotch firs not far from the house, but the birds were away on their daily travels, and their nests were silent in the noontide. Silent and desolate was the house itself, and the children grew very quiet as they approached it. Built of dark red brick, with many gables, its mullioned windows curtained with untrimmed ivy, its arched doorways surmounted by a coat of arms carved in white stone, it stood on an eminence commanding the park, and overlooking miles of country bounded by the sea. Along the wide frontage was a fine terrace with a stone balustrade,

adorned at intervals with urns, many of which had fallen from their pedestals ; and the terrace wall dropped abruptly to the edge of the river, whose waters fed the lake a little farther on. The gardens had been on the side of the house farthest from the grand approach, but they were a wilderness now, with here and there a flowering shrub struggling to the light through the tangled mass of foliage,

Major Ross led the way to a side-door, and pulled at a broken bell-handle that hung almost out of reach. After a long interval the door was opened, and a very old woman looked out and asked what he wanted.

"We should like to see the house, if you have no objection," he answered. "We have come all the way from Saltry, hoping you would show it to us."

"Certainly, sir," said the old woman, civilly. "It's a treat to me to see anybody here, for it's not often I look upon any face but my son's, from one week's end to another. If you'll go round to the back, I'll open the door of the great hall."

They did as she desired, and were soon ushered into a hall, the whole height and depth of the building. Its oaken rafters and panelled walls were black with age, and a noble trophy, formed of antlers, rose over the wide hearth. There was little furniture except rude oaken settles ; and a damp mouldy smell filled the place, as if air and sunshine were but seldom admitted. The principal rooms were dreary enough, too, with their faded hangings and dusty couches, but after passing through these, the

old woman led the party into a parlour that was far more interesting. One might have thought it had been but lately occupied, for an easy chair was drawn into the oriel window, and a book lay on the table beside it, as if the reader had but lately laid it there. There were pictures on the walls, too, some of them Italian landscapes, and a few portraits. Of these last, the most striking were one of a lady in the dress of seventy years ago, and another representing two pretty boys playing with a dog. Bessie walked up to these pictures at once, and the old woman, observing her, said—

“Ah, young lady! those were very like once, but a sad change came over them all!”

“Who were they?” asked Bessie.

“That was the old lady, my mistress, Mrs. Radstowe,” was the reply, “and those were her sons. Ah! who’d have thought it! Who’d have thought it!”

Major Ross drew near, and said, “We know nothing of the history of this place and the family it belonged to. Anything you feel disposed to tell us, we should be glad to hear.”

“It’s no secret, sir,” answered the old woman; “any person for miles round could tell you the story of the Radstowes. If you’ll sit down, ladies and gentlemen, I’ll tell you what I know.”

“The Radstowes owned this land for hundreds of years. Some say *Rad* stood for *red*, for they were all red-haired and hot-tempered. There were many sayings about them. One was, that when Storrham should be ruled by a woman’s

hand, trouble was on its way. Another, often in people's mouths, was—

“ Brother's hate
Is Radstowe's fate.”

“ Well, Storrham came to a woman at last, for the lady you see painted there, was at one time the last of the Radstowes, and heiress of all these lands. She was left an orphan, but she married early, and her husband took her name. They had two sons—the boys you see there; and when these were but infants their father died, and a sad day it was that saw him taken away. I was a girl then, but I remember Mrs. Radstowe, tall and stately in her widow's dress, leading her little boys into church.

“ Soon after that, I came to help in the nursery, so I saw how things went on. Mrs. Radstowe herself had never been used to control, and she never tried to rule her boys. Their wild, passionate tempers grew with their growth, and their quarrels were fearful to see, even when they were children. As time passed on, tutor after tutor came, and either was dismissed or refused to stay; so the boys grew up ignorant as young savages. They loved riding, and hunting, and shooting, but they were rough and rude, and unfit to associate with their equals. Mrs. Radstowe saw but little company. She was not one of those that could give way and make herself pleasant, and she seemed best pleased to live very much alone. She had given up riding, but she was active and vigorous, and used to walk miles every day, sometimes meeting her sons when they were out shooting, but oftenest alone. Harold, the

young one, was her favourite. She seemed jealous for him, because Alfred was to have this place. May God have forgiven her, if she put evil thoughts into their heads!

"Time passed on, and the boys were growing into men. All the gentlefolks round about, cried out on Mrs. Radstowe for the ill bringing-up she had given her sons; but she never heeded. She held up her head proudly, and would not see how much there was to fear for those who had never been checked. I said the brothers' quarrels were terrible to see when they were but little fellows in the nursery, and as years passed on, things grew worse and worse, till even their mother could not make peace between them. The old saying,

" Brother's hate
Is Radstowe's fate,"

began to be in everybody's mouth, and, in truth, the bad times were coming nigh.

"One day, when Alfred was out of the way, Harold wanted to go to the hunt, and found his own horse was lame. He ordered the groom to saddle a favourite horse of his brother's—a thing he had never dared to do before; but nothing would persuade him to give up going. I suppose Alfred would have been very angry if all had gone right; but it happened that, in trying to leap a fence, the horse fell, and, though Harold was not hurt, the poor beast was killed. I should be sorry to tell these young ladies and gentlemen what a scene there was when the *brothers met*. I hope they will never know what such

passions are like. Mrs. Radstowe tried to screen Harold, and this made Alfred worse. It was but a few days before the young heir would be of age, and there was to be a feast on his birthday; but before the time came he was gone, no one knew whither. He wrote, in his rage, that no one cared for him, and he would never see Storham again; and he never did. His mother found out he had sailed for America not long afterwards, but further than that she never knew till her dying day, poor soul!"

"What became of the brother?" inquired Mrs. Ross.

"He stayed here for awhile, but his mother was for ever reproaching him with Alfred's loss, and, after many a miserable scene, he went away too, and never returned. Mrs. Radstowe lived on alone here. This is the room she sat in by day, and I will show you her bedroom. For twenty years she lived on, watching and waiting for news that never came, and then she died."

The old woman rose and led the way back to the hall, and up a wide staircase, with balustrade carved richly in fruit and flowers, to a corridor that stretched the whole length of the house. She paused before a door, which she unlocked and threw open, and then she entered a large dreary bedchamber. "This was my mistress's chamber," she said, as she drew back the shutters and admitted the sunshine. "I like to keep it dusted and neat. Look, ma'am," she added, addressing Mrs. Ross, "see how white the carpet is worn—all the length of the room. That is where Mrs. Radstowe walked up and down at night, when she could not sleep."

"You were very much attached to your mistress, I think," remarked Major Ross.

"Yes, sir; who could help it? She was so generous-hearted and so unhappy! If you'll come this way," continued the old woman, "maybe the young gentlemen would like to see the young masters' rooms. Mrs. Radstowe put them as far apart as she could. This was Mr. Alfred's."

There was not much to see. Guns, fishing-rods, and hunting-whips were ranged on the walls, and some dusty strings of birds'-eggs, and glass cases containing butterflies were on the chimney-piece. Bessie remarked in a whisper to Mary Charlton, that the Radstowes must have been just the sort of boys to rob birds'-nests and kill butterflies. Harold's room, at the opposite end of the corridor, was very like his brother's, and there was nothing else of any interest in the house.

"Has nothing ever been heard of the lost heir?" asked Major Ross, as they descended the stairs.

"Yes, sir. Once, soon after Mrs. Radstowe's death, the lawyers believed they had come upon traces of him. It was in South America, where, as I've heard, there are great plains. He owned at one time great herds of cattle there, and was said to have made money. Then he had once gone a whaling-trip to the South Seas, and returned again to his cattle-dealing. So far they found out, but they could not discover what had become of him, and to this day they cannot tell, though they fancy he is alive."

"And Harold," said Mrs. Ross, "have you never had any news of him?"

"I hardly know how to answer you, ma'am," replied the old woman; "but in my own mind I am sure I have seen him and spoken with him. My son says it was a dream, but I am sure it was truth. About six years ago, I was dusting my mistress's room up-stairs, and I went to the window and saw a respectable-looking man on the terrace. He had his back to the house, and was leaning on one of the urns, as if he was ill or weary. I was startled to see a stranger there, and called out to know what he wanted. He turned slowly round and looked up at me, and I am sure he answered, 'I want nothing, thank you, Rachel.' The sound of the voice, speaking my own name too, and the look in the eyes, in spite of the hollow cheeks and grey hair, made my heart stand still. Then I gave a great cry, and said, 'Oh, Master Harold! is it indeed you?' I flew down the stairs, out at the side door, and round to the terrace, but when I got there he was gone. I called his name, I searched the woods till nightfall; but I could not find him, and I never saw him again. When my son came home he laughed at me, and said I had fancied it all, but I am sure I saw the real, living Harold Radstowe that day."

While the old woman led Mrs. Ross round to the terrace, Bessie lingered with Major Ross to look at the coat of arms carved over the hall-door. Major Ross understood heraldry, and had led Bessie to take an interest in the subject. Tokens of a warlike past were to be found in the arms of the Radstowes, and the crest was a mailed hand bearing a short sword. This crest was repeated over and over

again in the great hall, always surmounted by the motto, in quaint old spelling, "Toe y^e Deth" ("To the Death").

The old woman showed them another way of returning to the lodge, through a shrubbery almost choked in parts by the luxuriant overgrowth of neglected plants. She accompanied them part of the way, seeming loth to lose sight of them.

"It is but seldom I see anybody," she said, as Mrs. Ross at last took a kindly leave of her, "and these young faces seem to do me good. Don't forget old Rachel, my dears, if ever you come near Storrham again."

There was not much talking while they were still within the domain of the Radstowes. Even Fred and Charlie were subdued and grave, and no one thought of mentioning luncheon till the boundary had been passed, and then Major Ross proposed that they should carry the basket over the next hill, out of sight of Storrham Woods, with all their sad associations.



CHAPTER XXII.

BEAUCHAMP TOWERS.

THE happy days at Saltry were over at last, and Bessie was at home again, strong and active as ever. She had not forgotten to bring plenty of seaweed for Mrs. Charlton, and she carried it in, the morning after her return.

"Many thanks, dear Bessie, for recollecting me in the midst of your enjoyments," said Mrs. Charlton, as her thin hands lifted the long ribbons of seaweed almost lovingly from the basket. "I have been thinking of you, too, while you were away, and if you open that red case on the table, you will see a little keepsake, which I have had made for you."

Bessie opened the case, and a crimson flush rose to her very forehead as she caught sight of a delicate bracelet of hair, with a locket hanging to its clasp.

"It is made of my own hair," continued Mrs. Charlton, "as you will see by the threads of silver in it; but there are locks of my children's in the locket, and one pale-yellow ring from baby's head. Do you like my little keepsake, Bessie?"

Bessie's kisses were her only thanks for some time, but at last she found words to say that "nothing could have pleased her so much, or have been half so dear to her as this precious, precious bracelet, and she should love it as long as she lived. She could never forget how happy she had been in that dear room; and oh! would Mrs. Charlton sometimes write to her?" Yes, she would, and Bessie, in return, must write long letters, telling of everything she saw.

All was now ready for the grand move, and the time had arrived for the promised visit to Beauchamp Towers; so, late one afternoon, Miss Beauchamp Sauvry called for Gertrude and Bessie, and carried them off in the pony-chaise. About three miles on the other side of Coleham were the huge wrought-iron gates, with their many-twisted initials of B. S., and their lodges buried in flowering creepers. Two or three flaxen-haired children ran out to open the gates and receive a smile from Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, as she drove through. The ground rose but slightly to the house, which was a large pile of building, originally occupying three sides of a square, and having now additional wings stretching east and west. The pony-chaise passed into the paved court and stopped at the foot of the clock-tower, whose lowest chamber formed the hall of entrance. The dressing-bell was ringing as Miss Beauchamp Sauvry showed the little girls their bedroom within her own, and bade them change their dresses quickly, that they might go down with her.

"I have several people staying with me," she said;

"some sick and some sorry ; but I expect people who are neither the one nor the other to make themselves useful, so mind you try and cheer the little Smiths as much as you can."

"We will try," answered Bessie ; "but they are much older than we are."

"So they are, my child, but they are poor motherless things, and very helpless ; so pray do your best for them."

It was quite a relief to Bessie, on entering the drawing-room filled with strangers, to catch sight of Fanny and Emmy Smith nestling together in the recess of a window. She and Gerty joined them at once, and were shyly but cordially welcomed, and they all sat near each other at dinner and all through the evening. Miss Beauchamp Sauvry looked pleased as she wished them good-night, and told them they should go with her after breakfast the next morning to visit her school, and make arrangements for the feast which was to take place on the following Saturday.

The four companions were waiting in the hall the next day, when Miss Beauchamp Sauvry summoned them to follow her to the orphanage, which occupied the eastern wing of the great house. More than twenty girls, of ages varying from two or three to sixteen, were assembled in an airy schoolroom : all who could hold a needle, working, and the very little ones listening to a simple story which the mistress read aloud. They all rose as Miss Beauchamp Sauvry entered, and it was pleasant to see bright faces grow still brighter as she took her seat, and they came

thronging round her, eager for a word or a look. There was one pale, weakly little thing, who stood by quietly till she was lifted to the lady's knee, where she sat very still and perfectly contented, her eyes never moving from that kind and genial face. Presently there was a circle formed, and one of the elder girls put a Bible into Miss Beauchamp Sauvry's hand, for it was her delight to read and talk to them of Him who loved little children. She tried to lead each little hearer to do her duty for His sake and as in His sight; and as she spoke this morning, Gertrude and Bessie—perhaps, too, Fanny and Emmy Smith—felt their hearts stirred within them with the longing desire to serve God better in their daily life and conversation.

"I must go now," said the kind teacher, when her lesson was over. "I must go to my poor sick children, you know."

The pale child put up her face to be kissed, and then silently slipped to the floor, and the visitors departed. The way to the hospital for sick children was by an avenue of limes, ending at the garden-gate of an old-fashioned farmhouse, to which the hospital formed a wing. In the garden were yew-trees, cut into all sorts of fantastic shapes, hedges of box and lavender, and a store of gay and sweet-smelling flowers. Behind the building lay pasture-lands stocked with cattle, whose lowing was the only sound that could disturb the little invalids.

too, Miss Beauchamp Sauvry's coming was hailed with joy, and many a white face was turned towards the window to watch for her. Her manner was unspeakably

tender as she went round to each bedside. One little boy declared nobody could shake up his pillow so well as she did; and a little girl put a thin arm round her neck, and whispered that she had tried to be patient and not cry, because of a promise made the day before. There were sacred words to be spoken here also, and short prayers by the little beds; then a basket was produced with fresh fruit, books from the lending-library, and trifles to beguile the irksome hours of pain.

When they left the hospital Miss Beauchamp Sauvry was obliged to return to her guests, but her young friends went to the western wing, to visit the old ladies in the home. Some of these were widows, some had never been married, but all had been lonely and friendless till Miss Beauchamp Sauvry took them into her house, where each was provided with a bedroom and parlour, besides the large drawing-room and dining-hall in which all could meet. There was a pleasant garden in front of the windows, and rustic seats were placed under some of the large trees, that the old ladies might, if they liked, take their knitting out into the open air. There were twelve of these ladies, and several among them were great friends of Bessie and Gerty, who loved to visit them and hear them talk of the old, old days of their youth. On this day the conversation was only interrupted by the bell summoning the young ones to their luncheon.

In the afternoon there were plenty of amusements out of doors—archery or lawn-billiards on a shady lawn near the house, rambles in the shrubberies or across the park.

and rides or drives in the pretty country beyond. For those who preferred the house, there was the library, with its deep bay-windows shaded from the sun, where Bessie liked to recline with some beloved book before her; or, with eyes wandering from the emblazoned ceiling, with its hundred coats of arms, to the gardens and woods outside, to dream away an idle hour in trying to recal some of the long-past generations who had lived and died at Beauchamp Towers.



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE STORY OF A BRACELET.

THE time slipped by, and Saturday was come, the day of Miss Beauchamp Sauvry's great school-feast. Many a little face peeped out anxiously in the early morning to ascertain the state of the weather, and many a young heart rejoiced to see the sky without a cloud. The day kept the promise of its dawn, and by three o'clock, all the children of Coleham school were seen approaching the house, with banners flying, to be joined as they drew near by the children of the orphanage.

What need to tell of the games that were played, the races that were run, the mountains of cake that were devoured, or the cans of tea that were emptied? What words could describe the merry dances to the sound of the village-band, or the delight when every child received a separate gift from the inexhaustible basket that stood beside Miss Beauchamp Sauvry? All have witnessed some such scene, and they can easily picture to themselves this one.

At eight o'clock, after a second supply of cake, the Coleham children marched away homewards, singing some of their school choruses, which sounded sweetly across the park in the quiet evening air. The orphan girls still lingered in the garden, but they were tired of noisy play, and gathered in groups to discuss the events of the day, while the little toddling things of three or four years old were carried off to bed.

All agreed as to the success of the feast. Bessie was pleased to hear the children speaking of it as she joined one of the groups.

"There's only one thing, miss," said a little girl; "only just *one* thing that would make it better."

"What is that?" asked Bessie, in surprise.

"Why, miss, last year, when the Coleham children were gone, Miss Beauchamp Sauvry told us a story. Do you think, miss, you could ask her to tell us one now?"

"Come with me," answered Bessie, "and I will see what she says about it."

They went together across the lawn to a group of old cedars, whose heavy branches made a darkness on the grass below them. Here, resting from the day's exertions and watching with a calm and happy smile the purple bars that stretched across the red sunset, sat Miss Beauchamp Sauvry. She turned as they came nearer, and saw Bessie with a train of children following her, full of eagerness and curiosity.

"What is it, Bessie?" said she. "Do you want any-
from me?"

"Yes," said Bessie, smiling, "I am come with a petition. They say that last year you told them a story, and we all beg you will tell us one now."

"Tell you a story?" said Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, as the children clustered round her, some on the grass at her feet, some on the rustic bench on which she sat, and one loving little creature on her knee. "Tell you a story, you ask? Well! I must try, I suppose. What shall it be about? Will nobody say? Well, then, it shall be about a bracelet. Bessie thinks that must be a very good subject for a story, so I will begin:—

"In the West of England there once was a castle standing almost on the summit of a hill, only, indeed, just so far below it as to be a little sheltered from winds and storms. The sides of the hill were clothed with trees, beneath which grew flowering shrubs, clusters of periwinkle, tall plumes of fern, and tufts of hart's-tongue like knots of waving ribbon. A very steep road led up to the castle gate, straight from the plain below; but the pleasantest approach was by a path, winding round and round the hill, under green boughs all the way, and even passing the great door to lead up to a smooth bowling-green at the very summit, on a level with the chimneys of the castle. From this high ground there was a lovely view on all sides, bounded northwards by the blue Welsh hills beyond the Bristol Channel. A park rich in old, old trees, surrounded the hill, close to the foot of which lay a small village belonging to the lord of the castle.

"As to the castle itself, it was a huge pile of building, with grey stone walls, hidden in some parts by a heavy drapery of ivy. Towards the south a tall cloth-of-gold rose-tree had grown up to the very roof, while red and white roses mixed their heavy clusters on the chapel wall, and shaded the eastern window. Within the great oaken door there was a hall, very lofty and full of echoes, with armour and old banners hanging on the walls, and making strange gloomy sounds when the wind blew them about. With the exception of one room, hung with a very dreary-looking tapestry, representing the Plagues of Egypt, and furnished with old carved chairs and tables, so heavy as almost to require a giant's strength to move them, the rest of the apartments were more like those of a fairy palace than of an old time-worn castle. There were galleries hung with beautiful pictures, saloons with draperies of rose-coloured silk, with fair images of marble arranged between their many mirrors; and chambers, blue and pink and sea-green, containing couches shaped like sea-shells and surrounded with a cloud of white muslin, looking really too beautiful for mortals to sleep in. On the floors were carpets so soft that no foot-fall could be heard: in the windows stood gilded cages filled with bright birds, or baskets piled with rare flowers. In short, it is impossible to describe such a dwelling, and I can only say, as I said at first, that it was like a fairy palace.

"Now you would like to know who were the people who lived in this wonderful castle. Generally, there were ~~only~~ four persons, besides a numerous train of servants,

and these four were Lord Delmar and his two daughters and their governess. The father was a grave man, who sat in his library and wrote letters, or hunted among books and papers to make himself acquainted, I suppose, with the affairs of the nation, and to prepare the speeches which he occasionally made in the House of Lords. He talked a little to his sons whenever they came home, but they were generally absent, one with his regiment and the other at sea; and to his daughters he seldom had much to say, probably thinking they were not wise or learned enough to understand his remarks. They were very good and gentle girls however, one ten, the other twelve years old; and, like all else belonging to them, even their names were what you would call beautiful—Lady Blanche and Lady Constance Lisle. Now, almost all the year round, these girls were obliged to work very hard at their lessons, for Lord Delmar expected them to become very clever, and they had no mother to watch over them and indulge them with a day of rest now and then. Ah! yes, my children, these girls, whom you perhaps thought must be so happy because they lived in a beautiful castle—these girls were to be pitied after all, for their mother was dead. Only two years ago she had been taken away, and they had not ceased to miss her every day of their lives.

“Once a year their governess went away for a month, and during that time Blanche and Constance were allowed to invite some of their cousins to stay with them, and to pass their time just as they pleased. The cousins always

arrived the day before Blanche's birthday, that they might all keep it together. In the year of my story, the sun rose without a cloud on the birthday, and the cousins were assembled as usual, and had each presented some gift in honour of the occasion. Constance, too, had given her sister a present, and Lord Delmar alone had not produced anything. After breakfast, however, he called Blanche into his library and shut the door.

" 'Blanche,' he said, with a gravity that almost frightened her, 'you are my eldest daughter, and you are no longer a little child. I have therefore caused to be prepared for you a present which you are of an age to value. It is a bracelet,' he continued, opening a box and taking out a bracelet of soft brown hair, with a glittering clasp. 'It is made of your mother's hair, and fastened with the clasp she always wore round her neck. To you I am sure the gift will be invaluable, and I need not caution you to be very careful of it, otherwise I might warn you that the diamonds are of great price, and therefore should not be left about. Keep it all your life long.'

"Blanche took the precious bracelet and put it on her wrist. She could not speak her thanks, but she kissed her father with tearful eyes, and then went to exhibit her treasure to Constance and the cousins.

"In the afternoon, when Lord Delmar was gone for his ride, the young people proposed to take their books and work to a wood of Spanish chestnuts that was on the edge of the park, and pass some hours in the green shade. The party—eight in number, including all the cousins—were

soon equipped and tripping across the path, followed by a servant carrying books and baskets; and, once in the wood, it was easy to find a pleasant resting-place on the short fine grass. I need not tell you that there was not much reading or working after all, though there was plenty of talking and laughing, and even singing.

“‘How pleasant it would be if we could dance a little,’ remarked one of the cousins, at length. ‘What a pity that we have no music.’

“‘We will have some music, though,’ replied Blanche, and going near the maid who had followed them to the wood and was now sewing under one of the trees, she bade her go and tell Paolo to bring his guitar. Paolo was an old Italian servant of Lord Delmar’s, very fond of the young ladies, and ready to do anything he could for their amusement. While the little party waited for him, they sang choruses and even played at hide-and-seek to while away the time; and when he came and struck the chords of his guitar, they valed in and out among the trees till the long shadows warned them it was time to go in and prepare for dinner. When they were half way across the park on their return, Lady Blanche suddenly exclaimed, with a shriek of dismay,

“‘My bracelet! I have lost my bracelet!’

“They all gathered round her, full of concern; but there could be no doubt of the fact, the bracelet was gone.

“‘I know you had it just before we began to dance,’ said one of the cousins, ‘for I saw you slip it backwards and forwards over your hand.’

“‘Did I?’ said poor Blanche. ‘It was a trick I had with my old bracelet, but I never lost that. What shall I do?’

“‘Let us go back to the wood,’ replied Constance; ‘I dare say we shall find it.’

“They returned, feeling the grass with their feet as they went along, and eagerly searching under the chestnuts, but all in vain. After nearly an hour they went home, debating what was the next step they ought to take, and full of dread at the thought of telling Lord Delmar of the loss. Paolo remained still searching for a while, and then he followed them, with no tidings of the bracelet. It was very strange; the grass was quite short, there were no tufts in which the bracelet could have been hidden, and yet there was no sign of it far or near. No one could have passed in the short time that elapsed between their leaving the wood and discovering the misfortune. Where, then, could the bracelet be?

“In order to answer this question, I must go back a little in point of time, and take you to a home very unlike the castle. About a quarter of a mile beyond the edge of Lord Delmar’s park, was a small wooden hut of the very poorest description, standing in a green lane off the high road, so that a stranger’s foot very seldom passed its door. A plot of potatoes lay beside it, but the plants were nearly choked with weeds, and the whole place looked desolate and neglected. At four o’clock in the morning of Lady Blanche Lisle’s birthday, two little children who lived in this miserable hut were roused by their mother from the

heap of straw that formed their bed and her own. They sat up at her bidding, opening their sleepy blue eyes and wondering why the night was so short.

“‘Come, Nelly, come, Annie!’ said the mother, ‘you must get up now, for mother’s going out for the day, and it’ll be hard work to get back by night.’

“‘Me too!’ said Annie, in a sleepy voice. ‘Annie go too, mother,’ and she held out her arms.

“‘No, Annie,’ replied the woman, ‘I can’t take you to-day. There, don’t cry, child, for I don’t seem as if I could bear it.’

“By this time Nelly was quite awake. She saw her mother was in trouble, and she remembered having seen her cry the day before, after she had been to the village and fetched a letter. Nelly’s father was a sailor; could there be bad news of him?

“‘Hush, Annie,’ whispered Nelly to her sister, as she pulled the loose straws out of the little one’s curly hair and tied on her frock; ‘hush, dear! we’ll have a fine play in the lane, and find some flowers against mother comes back in the evening.’

“The mother scraped together a few sticks and made a little fire to boil her kettle; then called the children, and bade them kneel at her knee and say their prayers. She was crying softly all the time, and when they had done, she took Annie on her lap and made Nelly stand close by while she gave them her directions.

“‘Father’s ill, dears,’ she said, ‘and I must go and see him. I’ve a long way to walk before I can catch the

train, and I can't manage to take you. You may play outside all day, if you like, and mind you don't get into mischief. I shall be home by dark, so be sure you are good children. Look here, Nelly; there's this bit of a loaf and these cold potatoes for your dinner, and there's some odd crusts for your tea, only mind, you're not to try to make a fire—do you hear?’

“Nelly promised that she would get into no mischief, and the mother kissed them and departed, as soon as they had eaten their poor breakfast, and she had raked out every vestige of fire on the hearth. The children watched her down the lane with swelling hearts, and when she disappeared, it was as much as Nelly could do to pacify her sister. She called her attention to the daisies among the dewy grass, and showed her how to thread them on long rushes, and to stick them on thorns of the bushes that grew along the hedge. Then they brought the shovel from the house and dug a garden, surrounding it with a deep border of stones. In short, they found employment for themselves till the clock of some neighbouring village struck out the hour of eleven, and then they voted it time to dine. After dinner they found it very warm, so they coiled themselves up under a bush and went to sleep. When they woke, the air was so much cooler that they thought a walk would be pleasant, so, hand-in-hand, they sallied down the lane, and were tempted by a gap in the hedge, never observed before, to enter a corn-field. They soon found a narrow pathway, leading they knew not whither. The tall ripe corn on either side was higher

than their heads. It was a glorious place! The great heavy golden ears, shaded with brown, were ready for the sickle, but the reaper had not yet begun his toil; only the wind rustling the ripe grain made the children pause again and again, to ask each other what the strange, whispering sound could mean. Far up above them in the cloudless blue, larks sang joyfully; and at their feet the little field-mice ran into their holes, or a startled hare flitted past, or the whirr of a pheasant's wing made them start back in momentary fear. There were flowers, too, among the corn, scarlet poppy, blue scabious, and starry milk-wort. Little Annie's pinafore was so full that she dropped flowers as she went, so Nelly proposed that they should go to the end of the path, and then sit down and make a garland.

"As they drew near the edge of the field, they stopped in amazement at the sound of voices, and then Nelly crept forward, still screened from view by the corn, to get sight of the persons who were speaking. Now the corn-field sloped down to the very border of that wood of Spanish chestnuts, in which Lady Blanche Lisle and her sister and cousins were amusing themselves, so the sight that met Nelly's eyes was one that astonished her very much indeed. She beckoned to Annie to creep close to her, and they both crouched down behind some bushes where no one could see them, and watched the proceedings in the wood. I do not know whether poor little Nelly had ever heard of fairies, but I am sure she did not think the gay figures, with their silken garments, were the same kind of

beings as herself and Annie. Presently they sat in a ring and sang. How wonderfully beautiful their singing seemed to the little cottage girls! Nelly could not think why the sweet sound she loved to hear should make tears come into her eyes. Then came a fresh wonder; a man brought an odd-looking thing which he struck with his hand, making a pleasant sound, and the beautiful creatures divided into pairs, and with arms lovingly round each other, flitted in and out among the trees, their hair waving and their silken garments rustling as they moved. Nelly and Annie held their very breath that they might not lose a movement or a sound. At last the man stopped his playing, and the beautiful creatures trooped away over the turf, and were soon out of hearing.

“ ‘Oh, Annie,’ said Nelly, when they they had been gone a few minutes, ‘did you ever see such a sight as that? How pretty it was!’

“ ‘But Annie was rather cramped with her position, and not inclined to talk. She had found out, too, that it would be very easy to scramble from the corn-field into the chestnut wood, and she was resolved to try the experiment at once. Nelly was obliged to follow, and she could not help looking about her with great interest, when she reached the very place where the beautiful creatures had so lately been dancing.

“ ‘Wasn’t it beautiful, Annie?’ she said; and then, taking Annie’s hands, she began trying to imitate the movements she had been watching. Less gracefully, but not less gaily, *than Lady Blanche* and her friends, the little cottage

children flitted in and out among the trees, till Nelly, in one of her merry turns, struck her foot against something hard, and stooped to see what it was.

“ ‘Annie, look here,’ she exclaimed. ‘I do declare this is one of the grand things that one of them had on her arm. How it shines! And this part is all soft, like hair. I’ll put it on, and make believe to be one of *them*, and you make believe to be another;’ and the little girl drew up her head and danced another round with her sister. Suddenly they fancied they heard voices, and they flew over the bank to their former hiding-place, whence they witnessed the search for the bracelet, too much alarmed to come forward and confess they had found it. Nelly felt very uneasy all the time, and had nearly screwed up sufficient courage to show herself, when the young ladies once more left the spot, slowly and sadly enough this time, instead of tripping gaily as before. There remained only the tall man, with a great black beard and sharp black eyes, peering about in the wood, and his aspect seemed to Nelly so fierce and terrible, that she drew Annie still closer to her side, and sank down lower than ever behind the bushes. At last the man went away by the same path that the young ladies had taken, and when he was fairly gone, Nelly rose to her feet and began to give expression to her dismay.

“ ‘Oh, Annie!’ she cried, ‘whatever shall we do?’

“She did not expect much help from Annie, who was but three years old, and could not speak plainly, while Nelly herself was six—quite a woman in comparison.

But the little one was ready with an opinion on this occasion, for she at once laid her fat fingers on the unlucky bracelet, which was still on Nelly's arm, and said, 'Give lady, go give lady.'

"Nelly covered her with kisses, exclaiming, 'Quite right, Annie. Let us go and give it to the lady. I feel so frightened—they'll think I'm a little thief!—Oh! I wish I'd given it to them just now, when they were here.'

"Annie did not understand all this, but she repeated the words which had pleased her sister—'Go give lady, go give lady.'

"'Come then,' answered Nelly, 'let us go at once. Do you think you can walk so far? I don't know the way, only we must keep in the path where the beautiful ladies went.'

"Hand in hand they set forth, guided by the line of lighter green that marked the pathway across the park. It seemed a long, long way to poor little Annie, who was tired and hungry, and would sometimes sit down by the way and cry for her mother. Nelly consoled and encouraged her as best she could, pointing out the deer feeding on the slopes far off, and the windows of the castle glittering like jewels in the light of the setting sun. The foot of the hill was reached in time, and they began mounting the winding path, which led them to a terrace in front of the castle. Glass doors were wide open, and within a chamber of wonderful beauty, seated on rose-coloured couches, and dressed in white garments, were the Ladies Lisle and their six cousins. Lady Blanche was in

tears, and the rest were trying to comfort her, but she only sobbed the louder for all their kind words and loving kisses.

"Nelly's courage sank again at sight of the ladies. She was bewildered by the splendour of the room in which they sat, and half-frightened at the marble images standing in recesses along the wall. With round eyes of wonder she and Annie stood gazing, when the tall man with the black beard and sharp eyes entered the room and spoke to Lady Blanche. Before she had raised her head to answer, he caught sight of the two cottage-children on the terrace, and came forward to speak to them. Nelly trembled so much that she had not strength to run away as this terrible being approached. His voice, however, sounded kind and gentle as he said, 'What want you here, littel shild? Who are you?'

"For answer, Nelly held up the bracelet, which he seized with a cry of joy that drew Blanche to the terrace with all her young relations. She took the precious bracelet from Paolo and put it on her wrist with a smile of delight, and then turned to question Nelly, who looked up steadily with her honest blue eyes, and told her simple story from beginning to end.

"'I am very glad you have got the pretty thing again, lady,' she said, as she concluded. 'I was afraid at first; but you will not call me a little thief. Come, Annie, we must go home, for mother will soon be coming back.'

"'Stop!' cried Lady Blanche, as the little sisters turned away; 'you must have some supper before you go;' and

she took them herself into the housekeeper's room and fed them, and gathered from Nelly all that the child could tell of her mother's poverty and distress. Nelly said her father was a sailor, and he had just arrived at Bristol, where he was very ill. Her mother did needlework when she could get any to do, but sometimes they were very hungry, and mother had no bread to give them. Mother was teaching her to read and sew, but Annie was too young to do anything. This was all that Nelly knew, but it interested Lady Blanche very much.

" 'I will come and see your mother to-morrow, Nelly, if papa will let me,' she said. 'Tell her I want very much to be a friend to her honest little girl.' "

"When Lady Blanche was called away to her dinner she left Paolo to take care of the little girls, and after they had done their supper this terrible man with the black beard took Annie in his arms, and, guided by Nelly, carried her all the way to her mother's door, sometimes singing softly in a strange language, to soothe his tired little charge to sleep, and sometimes cheering Nelly in words that sounded oddly, but were unmistakably kind. They met the weary mother in the green lane near the hut. She had found her husband better than she expected, and removed to a higher berth in consequence of his steadiness and good conduct. Only mothers can tell how pleased she was with all that Paolo had to say of her little girl. Nelly produced a can of soup which the housekeeper had bidden her carry home for her mother, and Paolo left the hut, with *kind words*, and promises of finding his way thither again.

“Better days had come for Nelly and her mother. Little Annie was not to cry with hunger any more. Instead of the miserable wooden hovel, they lived in one of the lodges of the castle, and few were the days in which Nelly did not get a nod or a few words from Lady Blanche, as she ran to open the great gates, or conned her lessons in the school, where her diligence was increased by the hope that she might one day be clever enough to be ‘own maid’ to Lady Blanche at the castle.”



CHAPTER XXIV.

FAREWELL TO THE RED HOUSE.

ALL things have an end, even pleasant visits ; and the day came when Gerty and her sister must bid farewell to Beauchamp Towers, probably for years ; since, two days later, they were to leave the Red House, and pass the time until their embarkation for Malta, at Marley Hall, far on the other side of Southampton. Already Miss Beauchamp Sauvry had several times called for Mrs. Elvington, and taken her and her children to say farewell to different friends in the neighbourhood ; but the saddest farewells were yet to be spoken. The morning they left Beauchamp Towers, Gertrude and Bessie paid an early visit to the old ladies in the home. One produced a netting-case she had made for Bessie, another gave Gerty a purse of her own knitting ; and the little girls carried away with them a grateful and pleasant recollection of their old friends, as they had seen them last, in their pretty, shady parlour, with the scent of the *mignonette* floating in through the open window.

Another tearful face left Beauchamp Towers that same day—one of the girls brought up in Miss Beauchamp Sauvry's school, and afterwards taught to be a servant under that lady's own maid. All the neighbourhood were glad to get servants thus prepared for their duties, and there were always several under instruction in the great house, after leaving the orphanage. Mrs. Elvington had selected one of these as an 'attendant for her little girls; but poor Mary Cole was almost heart-broken when the parting moment came, and needed a cheering word from Miss Beauchamp Sauvry before she could check her sobs, or look hopefully to the future.

In the afternoon, Mrs. Elvington and her children went to take leave of their friends at Coleham. There was the good old rector, who had held them each and all in his arms at the font, and who had an especial tenderness for all whom he called the lambs of his flock. There was the rector's sister, older than himself, with her snow-white hair combed smoothly above a face that expressed the gentleness and kindness of her nature. There were the Nicholsons, whom they had always liked. Nay, there was Mr. Butler, for whom Charlie had never felt any great affection, yet, now that it came to a parting, the boy was amazed to find how sorry he felt.

There were many, too, among the poor who had kind words to say, and the remarks of one old woman tended to raise Charlie's spirits again, after his interview with Mr. Butler. She was the mother of a very intelligent young man, to whom the Elvingtons had often lent books.

which he was in the habit of reading aloud to her in the evening after his day's work.

"Well, so you be really going?" she said, when Mrs. Elvington bade her good-bye. "My son told me you were going to France, or America, or some of those parts. Do ye go by land or by water, ma'am?"

"We go in a large steam-ship," was the reply; "we are going to Malta."

"And that's by water, is it? Now do'ee, ma'am, take my advice, and go by land. Them ships are so dangerous; and think of all these young ones!"

"But England is an island, and so is Malta," said Gerty. "We can't go by land."

"Ah! my dear, you young ones be very clever, and I'm an ignorant old woman; but I say it again—if I was your mamma I'd go by land."

They could not help laughing, but the old woman took it all in good part, and bade them God-speed whichever way they went; "but," she continued, as she closed the garden-gate after them, "do'ee be wise, ma'am, and keep to the dry land."

Late in the evening, the Elvingtons, with Major Ross and the Charltons, walked across the common to old Showers's cottage. The old man and his wife were still well and strong, and all belonging to them seemed in a most flourishing state. Cadmore—serjeant no longer—was in one of the large early apple-trees, gathering the ripe fruit, and throwing it to Jessy and the other children, *who stood* with pinafores outspread, looking up with happy,

healthy faces, and laughing so merrily that the visitors approached them unheeded. No sooner, however, did Bessie touch Jessy's shoulder, than the latter, emptying her pinafore into the basket already half full of rosy fruit, came forward, blushing with shy pleasure, to greet all the party. Old Nancy, too, presently came forth from the cottage, eager to exhibit the baby, now almost too heavy for her weak arms, though Mrs. Cadmore in vain offered to relieve her of his weight. It was a happy family, and the Elvingtons were very unwilling to say the last words; but at length Mrs. Elvington found it was time to go, and offered the old man her hand. He took it between his, and his voice trembled as he bade God bless her and her children.

"Good-bye, Jessy," said Bessie, as cheerfully as she could. "I have given the beautiful geranium you brought me in the spring, to Mrs. Charlton. You cannot think how much she admired it, and how pleased she was to have it."

Jessy stood long at the garden-gate, watching the party as they walked, far more steadily and gravely than was their wont, homewards across the common. Old Showers presently joined her.

"I stood here once watching grandmother lead you away, little one," he said, patting her head. "My old heart was heavy enough then, God knows; but you came back, Jessy, and joy came with you. We must always hope, little one, we must hope on to the end."

Meanwhile, all the party crossing the common were

silent, till Charlie exclaimed, in a doleful tone, "Well! it's of no use to be down-hearted. 'Care killed a cat,' they say."

"And I wonder what killed the kitten," rejoined Fred Charlton, mischievously.

"Shame, shame, Fred!" shouted a chorus of voices, as Charlie grew crimson at the allusion; but Gerty wisely began talking on a less dangerous topic, and presently the conversation became general.

"I dare say you'll all be merry again by this time to-morrow," said Fred; "but we shall be dismal enough here, without you. What sort of a place is it that you are going to?"

"Oh! you would like Marley Hall very much," said Bessie. "It is a very old house, with all sorts of queer nooks and corners in it. When you go in, you find yourself in a large hall, with a roof of great oaken beams, like a church, and at one end there is a music-gallery with an organ in it. We have not been there for a long time, and I shall like to see the place again."

"Do you recollect the Christmas party we had there once, when you were very little?" said Gerty. "There were fiddlers up in the music gallery, and we danced in the great hall. My aunt was alive then, but now there are only my uncle and my two cousins at Marley. My eldest cousin is a great boy of sixteen, more like Harry than Charlie, for he is fond of books. He likes music too, and plays very well on the organ. My other cousin is quite a little boy, younger than Tomtit."

"We had such a fright one day," said Charlie, "when little cousin Alfred was about two years old. You must know there are some ruins in the park. In front of the house there's a lawn, then a lake, and beyond the lake the ruins of an Abbey. Part of the refectory, where the old monks used to dine, is quite perfect still, roof and all; but the rest is only ivied walls scattered about, or heaps of fallen stones overgrown with plants and grass. We used to play hide-and-seek there, and scramble about famously. It was great fun. One day we were there, all of us and my two cousins, and we were playing at a siege. There was a dungeon under a sort of broken tower, and we put our war prisoners, Alfred and Tomtit, in there, while Harry and I manned the walls, and my other cousin, Herbert, led the assault. Just as the besieging army came on, and Harry and I shouted out that we defied them, the wall began to totter under our feet. We jumped off down to the grass, but down fell the wall, covering up the entrance of the dungeon where the little ones were. We all set to work to move the fallen stones and bricks, Tomtit and Alfred squeaking all the while like rats in a trap, and we soon got them out, not a bit hurt, except that Tomtit had a lump on his forehead as big as a pea."

"What did your uncle say?" inquired Fred.


"I can't say he was particularly pleased to see his ruin still further decayed," said Charlie, smiling; "and we were never allowed to climb about there any more. The worst of it was, poor Herbert got into a scrape, and he had only

played out of good nature to us. Mamma begged him off after a little while, though."

In such talk the young people wiled away the time till they separated for the night—the last night the Elvingtons were to pass in the dear old Red House.

The actual day of departure dawned, and it was almost a relief to know the leave-taking would soon be over. All the Elvingtons went early to Mr. Ross's, and were admitted one by one to see Mrs. Charlton, who was just then weaker than usual. Bessie clung fondly to her friend, but was soothed by Mrs. Charlton's loving caresses and calm, kind words, till she was able to look up and smile. So they parted, true and fast friends in spite of their difference of years.

About noon arrived Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, to convey the whole family to the station in her large barouche, poor Mary Cole having gone first with the luggage. Charlie and Bessie had walked round the field, orchard, and garden; had taken a last look at the rockwork, now gay with many flowers; and had even, if truth must be told, kissed the pony and the cow. There was nothing for it now, but to jump into the carriage and leave the Red House with the best grace they could, and if a few tears were shed, they were such as might well be pardoned.

The station was soon reached, and there stood Major Ross with Fred beside him, eager to be of use. There was only time for hasty farewells, for the train came shrieking up, and two minutes later Bessie was looking back at  *Miss Beauchamp Sauvry*, making affectionate signs from

the platform. It was all too hurried for much grief, but every one was disposed to be silent during the early part of the journey. The first circumstance that restored animation to the party, was the discovery of a mysterious parcel under one of the seats, addressed to Mrs. Elvington. On being opened, it was found to contain a present for each and all, chosen with due regard to their several tastes and ages, by the kind Miss Beauchamp Sauvry, whose name, seldom pronounced by any person without feelings of gratitude and love, was declared by Charlie, on this occasion, to be worthy of being written in letters of gold.

And here ends our chronicle of the Elvingtons. They have left the Red House, and we lose sight of them, flying along at railroad speed to new scenes and new friends, but carrying with them very tender thoughts of the happy home that had sheltered their childhood.

THE END.



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